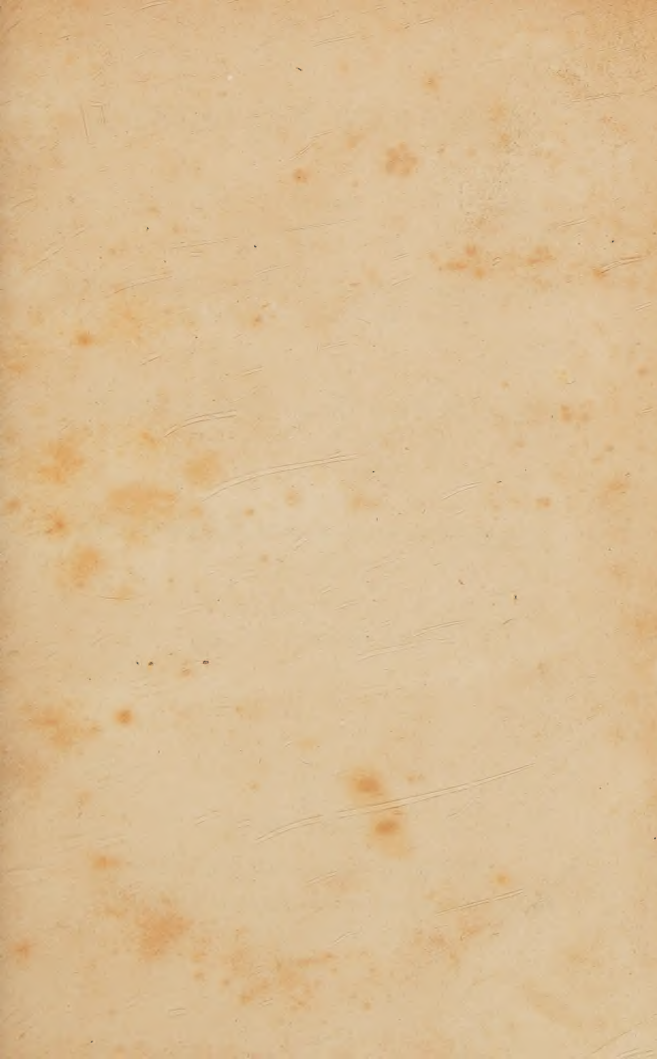




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CHRISTIAN EXERTION:

OR, THE

DUTY OF PRIVATE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
TO LABOR FOR THE SOULS OF MEN

EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

GREET PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, MY HELPERS IN CHRIST JESUS.
Rom xvi, 3.

GEORGE PECK, EDITOR.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE doctrines and appeals of this little manual will come home to the heart and conscience of every true lover of Jesus Christ, and the souls for which he shed his precious blood. None such, after reading these pages, will ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" But all will be led to see, at once, that if the world is ever converted, it must be, to a considerable extent, by the instrumentality of personal Christian effort. Each Christian is necessarily involved in a portion of the responsibility. Every one can do something toward the redemption of the race. Let all prepare for the day when God shall "make inquisition for blood," that then the blood of none of our brethren may be found upon our skirts.

GEORGE PECK.

New-York, October 21, 1845.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

THE following pages are designed to convince private Christians of the duty of making efforts for the conversion of souls to God, and to direct them in the prosecution of such efforts.

The exertion for which the writer pleads is of a kind adapted, not to supersede, but to sustain and strengthen, the sacred office of the Christian ministry.

To the solemn responsibilities and duties of that office he has made no lengthened reference—partly from feelings of diffidence, and partly because he conceives he may better accomplish the object he has in view by addressing himself exclusively to private members of the church of Christ.

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CHRISTIAN EXERTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST QUALIFIED AND CALLED TO LABOR
FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD.

“Arise, shine ; for thy light is come.”—Isa. lx, 1.

BETWEEN the character, condition, and prospects of those who, by divine grace, constitute the church of Christ, and of mankind in general, a contrast the most striking exists, and is frequently presented to our notice, under a variety of forms and figures, in the book of God. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” 1 John v, 19. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John iii, 36. “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience : among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God,

who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Eph. ii, 1-5. "Be ye not, therefore, partakers with them (the children of disobedience.) For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Eph. v, 7, 8.

How eminently adapted are representations like these to produce in the breasts of believers not only fervent gratitude to Him who hath called them "out of darkness into his marvelous light," (1 Pet. ii, 9,) but also the most compassionate concern for those whose character and condition are still what their own formerly were! "What shall I render unto the Lord?" what can I do for my perishing fellow-men? are questions which equally become the real Christian. How important is it, both for our own sake and for that of the world, that we form a correct estimate of its necessities, and of the privileges and responsibilities of the church of Christ.

The Bible represents the world—the bulk of mankind—as being involved in a gloom like that of midnight: "darkness" covers "the earth, and gross darkness the people." Exceedingly painful are the ideas which this representation is designed to convey; and yet how accurately does it exhibit the present state of the heathen world! There we see, in all its horrors, the darkness of ignorance. Our allusion is not to the elements of science, the

page of history, or the arts of civilized life. There is an ignorance inexpressibly worse, in every point of view, than that which relates to these things, important as they are. We mourn that our fellow-men are unenlightened on spiritual subjects ; that they are ignorant of themselves, of the ever-blessed God, of the necessity and way of salvation ; ignorant, in a word, of all which it most concerns man to know. They may worship, but it is an “unknown God ;” they may offer sacrifices, but such only as cannot take away sin ; they may “consider” themselves, but it is by the aid of principles which will certainly lead astray ; they may think of futurity, but their ideas are valueless as the wild and flitting “dream when one awaketh.”

There is the darkness of sin. The heathen are in general plunged into vices of the most degrading kind. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans presents a fearful picture of the world without God, at its best estate. Highly civilized—teeming with statuaries and painters, mathematicians, naturalists, and mental philosophers, poets, statesmen, and orators, whose renown has filled the world, and whose works remain, the admiration and the models of succeeding ages—the moral state of Greece and Rome was yet such as that awful chapter describes, such as can be compared only to gross darkness—the entire absence of purity, righteousness, and true holiness. Can we wonder that the uncivilized heathen are what they are ? By them the worst impurities are practiced

without a blush ; cruelties the most enormous perpetrated without a shudder ; the mother destroys, with her own hand, the life of her offspring ; the child abandons his aged and helpless parents to the river, or the beasts ; tribe makes war upon tribe for the purpose of acquiring prisoners, and selling them into hopeless slavery ; idols the most contemptible receive the profoundest homage of rational and immortal beings—homage, of which cruel and licentious deeds make up a principal part.

Hence, then, follows the darkness of misery. The heathen are destitute of the happiness they are adapted to enjoy ; they are never instrumental in effecting that usefulness for which God has designed his intelligent creatures. For all the ends which could have been contemplated in the formation of such a being as man, they might as well—they might far better—be lions, tigers, or stones. They have, in life, no pursuits, nor any bliss worthy of intelligent creatures ; in sickness, no adequate comfort ; in death, no hope. “Gross darkness” covers them.

We have been thinking of the character and condition of nearly EIGHT HUNDRED MILLIONS of immortal beings in heathen lands. But let not the Christian reader suppose that to them alone such remarks apply. There is a “world” in every enlightened land—there is one around ourselves.

In principle, although not, perhaps, in detail, everything already said may be regarded as

appropriately describing multitudes who live under the sound of the gospel. How many are there within the view of the reader, perhaps in the very bosom of his own family, who are without God and without hope in the world! Well informed, it may be, on other subjects, and not unenlightened, so far as the mere intellect is concerned, about divine things, yet still spiritually ignorant on all topics of supreme importance; not immoral, perhaps, in outward conduct, but carrying about with them hearts which are "enmity against God," and therefore capable of originating all wickedness; not miserable in their own esteem, or in that of others, but quite destitute of that

"Religion which can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live."

If from the two hundred millions, who are called Christians, we deduct those whose profession is palpably nominal, and nothing more; those who are misled by perverted and unhal-
lowed views of divine truth; those whose creed may be sound, but whose lives are openly at variance with it; and those who are avowed unbelievers—the careless, the deceived, the immoral, and the infidel—will Christian charity rebuke us if we express the conviction that not one half of those who are popularly termed Christians can be regarded as really such; that there are in the world, including children, to whom in a few years all these remarks will fully apply, nine hundred millions of immortals

who still need conversion of heart to God—who are still in darkness and the shadow of death?

Nor let it be forgotten that in the case of these vast multitudes thus living without God, without hope, without Christ, without light, in the world, the darkness under which they labor is to a greater or less extent voluntary, and therefore criminal. The apostle (Rom. i, 18-21, 28) affirms and proves that the heathen are without excuse; much more, then, their brethren who have heard the gospel, and upon whom its mighty motives to obedience have been brought to bear in vain. They are all living in a world of mercy and of hope. In spite of this mercy, which they abuse, they are perishing; until at length the lamp of hope expires, and they are left in utter darkness. To each individual of those millions death is approaching to execute, in God's appointed time, his dread commission. They give up the ghost, and where are they? a darkness never to be dispelled awaits them in the world beyond the grave. Reader! is the foregoing description just? Is it not then entitled to your very serious consideration?

How delightful the contrast presented in the church of Christ,—a church disdaining to be limited by the narrow boundaries man would erect; and including within itself all who really love God, all who rely on the atonement of Christ for salvation, all who are sanctified by the sacred Spirit. Such persons were once

darkness even as others, but now are they light in the Lord. Eph. v, 8. They sat in darkness and the shadow of death; but upon them the great light has shined. Isa. ix, 2. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv, 6. Christ is, according to his own word, the "light of the world." John viii, 12. He is the "true light," John i, 9; the "Sun of righteousness;" and he has arisen, "with healing in his wings," upon those that fear him. Mal. iv, 2. In them meet the very opposites of the painful ideas suggested by the darkness of the sinful world. The light of the church is come. She has knowledge of the character and ways of God, and of the plan of salvation. To her, life and immortality are brought to light; and all her children are taught of God. Isa. liv, 13. In them purity of life and conduct has been produced by divine grace; hence it is said, as a solemn warning to all professors of religion, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, (that is, in sin,) we lie, and do not the truth." 1 John i, 5, 6. No man has any evidence that he is a Christian, in whom the elements of a holy life do not exist.

Joy, too, becomes the members of the church of Christ. "Justified by faith," they "have peace with God." All things, even the most painful, are working together for their good.

They are on the way to heaven. All its bliss is prepared for them, and awaits their coming. Hence it is said to them, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Phil. iv, 4. Upon the church the glory of God has arisen, and is continually resting. That glory is to Zion her protection, and to the world around the infallible indication of his complacent regard. He has created "upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; and upon all, the glory" is "a defense." Isa. iv, 5.

Such, then, is the church of Christ. An ark floating on a wide waste of waters—a verdant spot surrounded by an arid and sandy desert—a mountain-top, on which at noon-day the splendor of the sun rests, while below, the dark clouds are rolling, and the lightnings flashing, and the storm beating in all its fury; and from which, while the valleys continue wrapped in a darkness like that of midnight, the earliest dawn may be discerned. With what devout and grateful feelings should the Christian think of his privileges, his security, and the honor divine grace has conferred upon him!

But every privilege bestowed on man involves obligation. God has given, or rather lent, nothing to be selfishly enjoyed. We are but trustees of his bounty; holding it for the benefit of our fellow-men, as well as for our own good. Hence the representations of the church of Christ, which so frequently occur in Scripture, in

which she is compared to salt, leaven, light. The salt is to diffuse its savor ; the leaven to "leaven the whole lump;" the light to shine. By the possession of divine truth she is qualified, and therefore called, to labor for the benefit of a benighted world. "Arise, shine ; for thy light is come," is the standing command of God to his church. From what has been already advanced, the import of this precept will be sufficiently obvious. Is light the emblem of knowledge ? The church is required to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without." Col. iv, 5. Of purity ? the spirit and conduct of her members must be unclouded by any sinful feelings or indulgences. Their light must "so shine before men," that others "may see" their "good works, and glorify" their "Father who is in heaven." Matt. v, 16. Of joy ? then should Christians cultivate a cheerful, happy spirit, which may serve to recommend religion to those who are seeking happiness, but find it not. Is light the most diffusive thing in the universe ? We are taught to bear our testimony, and to extend it as widely as possible, on those great themes which concern the eternal interests of our fellow-men. Thus shall we be "as lights in the world." Phil. ii, 15. Thus shall we "show forth the praises of Him who hath called" us "out of darkness into his marvelous light." 1 Peter ii, 9.

The great fact couched under such figurative representations is, that the church of Christ is designed to be a vast, aggressive, missionary

body ; feeling herself bound to labor for the salvation of unconverted men, while any such remain on earth, not less by the very privileges she possesses, than by the distinct command of her great Lord : " Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark xvi, 15.

Has the church, it may be asked, maintained this position ? The reply will be made with mingled feelings. Nobly, in the first ages, were the resources of Christians consecrated to this work ; brilliantly did their light shine ; but alas ! all the praise we bestow upon the missionary character of that period is but a satire upon subsequent coldness, indolence, and neglect. We gratefully acknowledge the revival of a missionary spirit, and of corresponding effort, during the last half century ; but still we feel that, especially in relation to HOME effort—the most important and easy of any—it is needful to say to the church, Arise ! for there still remains much of indolent repose ;—Shine ! for there is still much darkness into which spiritual light has not pierced. Reader, is not the appeal necessary ? Do you not know many professing Christians who are doing positively nothing on behalf of perishing souls ? Are there many who are evidently doing all they can ? Are not the resources of the church far, very far, from being all consecrated in faith and love, by prayer and self-denial, to this great work ?

What delightful results may be anticipated

from the appropriate employment of those means with which God has been pleased graciously to intrust his church! Eminent holiness, consecration, and prosperity in the church will bear health and happiness to the world. "God be merciful unto *us*, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon *us*. That thy way may be known on earth, thy saving health among all nations." *Psa. lxxvii, 1, 2.*

Scriptural activity and real success have an invariable connection. It may not be always immediately manifest, but "the day shall declare it."

When Zion "shines forth," she is obeying the command of God, employing the means he has provided, breathing a spirit of compassion like his own, and seeking his glory. Can the issue be doubtful? He will honor his people assuming such a position, for in so doing they are honoring him. His Spirit poured out will breathe upon the dry bones around, and breathe upon themselves more abundantly. His blessing, without which no real good can be effected, will be richly bestowed. The spectacle of his church in her glory will prove attractive to the benighted world. Attention will be fixed—inquiry awakened—admiration, hope, confidence, will be produced. "We will go with you," it will be said: "for we have heard that God is with you." *Zech. viii, 23.* The bright circle of the church will be thus continually increasing—gaining ground on the empire of darkness. As the wise men came to the star of the nativity,

Matt. ii, 2; as the Greeks to the feast that they might "see Jesus," John xii, 20, 21; so will the Gentiles come to the light of the church, "and kings to the brightness of" her "rising." Isa. lx, 3. Then will Christ be indeed "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of" his "people Israel." Luke ii, 32. Then "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isa. ii, 2-4. Then men shall be blessed in our divine Redeemer, and "all nations shall call him blessed." Psal. lxxii, 17. Then shall the church go forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Cant. vi, 10. Then "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isa. xl, 5.

Saviour! baptize thy church with thine own Spirit! give us grace to obey thine own com-

mand ! remove those obstacles to the conversion of a world which our worldliness, and pride, and sloth, have presented !

“ Then, come ; and, added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one—the crown of all the earth ;
Thou who alone art worthy.”

CHAPTER II.

THE DUTY AND BENEFITS OF PERSONAL EXERTION FOR THE
WELFARE OF OTHERS.

“ And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.”—Luke xix, 13.

IN the former chapter the reader's attention was invited to the great moral contrast which exists between the church of Jesus Christ and the world at large ; to the duty consequently devolving on the former to seek by all appropriate means the welfare of the latter ; and to the grand results which may be confidently anticipated from the faithful discharge of that duty.

Let us now survey this theme in its relation not so much to the church as a whole, as to the individual responsibility of its members.

The views entertained by our Lord's immediate disciples on many points, and especially in relation to the kingdom he came to establish, were exceedingly defective and erroneous. They connected his going up to Jerusalem for

the last time with the immediate establishment of a glorious, but worldly empire; with the triumphant overthrow of their enemies the Romans, and the distribution of rewards and honors to his followers. On account of these gross misconceptions, our Lord delivered the parable from which are taken the words at the head of this chapter, which, among other things, was evidently designed to teach them, that whatever might be the nature of their ultimate reward, they must first pass through a season of trial, of labor, and of solemn account. The absence of their Lord would test their fidelity, and afford suitable opportunities for the exercise of those abilities with which he had seen fit to intrust them.

The people of Christ, in every age, may learn from this instructive parable, that in order to the extension of their Master's kingdom, and the ultimate attainment of those rewards he has provided for his servants, there must be personal efforts to do good on the part of all who profess themselves his followers. To each of them he has given at least one talent; and to each he says, "Occupy till I come."

Will the reader kindly and attentively consider the remarks which follow, and which are designed to show that it is the positive duty of every Christian to do something for the glory of Christ, and the good of souls?

Every Christian has some talent—something which admits of improvement for the honor of his Lord and Master, and for the welfare of men

around him. We take the lowest ground as the most certain, and as being of universal application. It might be said, in accordance with the representation of another parable, that some Christians have but one talent—that others have two—and others five. Certainly all are not alike endowed; and where much is given much will be required. But let not the humbler Christian forget that great and painful drawbacks frequently attend distinguishing privileges. The highly-intellectual man is often the subject of distressing doubts, to which his inferiors in mental power are strangers. One who has extensive possessions may be devoid of bodily health; and another who has ample stores of knowledge, perhaps may be unable to utter two sentences clearly for the benefit of his fellow-men.

Milton was blind. Cowper was the subject of deep depression, and even of entire prostration of mind. Through a long life, Robert Hall rarely enjoyed a day's freedom from excruciating pain.

Let such facts teach us contentment with our own lot, whatever it may be; let them lead us to perceive that there is a greater equality than we may have been disposed to imagine in the distribution of the means of usefulness among Christ's followers. All have intrusted to them some one thing with which, if so disposed, they may do good. "Knowledge," says Lord Bacon, "is power." Even an acquaintance with the laws of the material world, and the useful

arts, may be turned to good account for Christian purposes. The limekiln and the smith's forge, under the hands of the lamented missionary, Williams, were the means of inducing, in many heathen minds, a saving attention to the truths of the gospel. The best knowledge—that of Jesus Christ—is a talent which qualifies its possessor to become the means of saving souls from death, and hiding the “multitude of sins.” The power of speech, that glory of the human frame, is another talent intrusted for the same purpose. Relationship is another, which gives us over the minds of our fellow-creatures an influence more or less powerful, according to its nearness. Property, again, is a talent by which the temporal wants of men may be relieved, and more spiritual objects attained. Sensibility, or compassion, is another. By its influence we are ourselves excited to labor, and those are softened and rendered accessible to our efforts whose good we seek. Prayer, which arrests the arm of Deity, and brings down upon ourselves and others the best blessings of Heaven, is another talent—one always available, and of the very highest order. All these things are means of doing good; and every Christian has certainly one or more of them committed to him.

Every Christian has those around him to whose circumstances and wants his talent, whatever it may be, is exactly adapted—persons who need to have precisely such an influence, as he is capable of exerting, brought to

bear upon them. On this point it were superfluous to dwell. Let the reader recall the facts stated in the previous chapter ; or, if any doubt exist in his mind as to their accuracy, let him simply look around his own dwelling. In the streets, the courts and alleys of every populous town, all who seek them, all who do not willfully close their eyes, may find, in abundance, objects for the exercise of Christian compassion, Christian beneficence, Christian exhortation, and believing prayer. Nor in the thin, scattered population of our villages and hamlets is the number of such objects less in proportion ; or their ignorance, misery, and need, less in fact. Every Christian is in the midst of those who may be benefited by the right employment of his talents.

It becomes, then, easy to advance to another remark ; that the mere possession of the talent, in such circumstances, teaches, in the most unequivocal manner, the duty of using it.

The principle pervades the whole of God's creation, that nothing is designed for the sole and selfish use of its possessor. The fleecy covering of the sheep is intended for another purpose besides the comfort of its original owner. The sweet perfumes of the flower exist not for themselves. The light and heat of the sun are diffused over the whole world, and exert their benign influence even on creatures incapable of conscious enjoyment. And, in truth, there is written on the human heart, even where religion may have no place, a law in which this great

principle is fully recognized. All men would execrate the wretch who, possessed of general medical skill, and especially of some specific remedy for a dangerous disorder which was prevailing around, should refuse to act on behalf of the perishing creatures who were unable to secure any other efficient aid. What would be our own feelings of self-reproach and abhorrence, if, passing the house of a sleeping neighbor, we perceived it to be on fire, and refrained from giving an alarm? or if we saw a blind man unconsciously approaching the brink of a tremendous precipice, and neglected to warn him of his danger? Those feelings of self-condemnation, which you are conscious you would experience, are witnesses to the truth of our statement, that the bare possession of the means of doing others good, necessarily involves the duty of using them. Can it be so in temporal things, in matters which relate to the life and welfare of the body, and not in connection with those interests which are spiritual and eternal? Is it not, rather, pre-eminently true in reference to such things, that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin?" James iv, 17. What an insult to the wisdom of God, to suppose that he has intrusted to any man the means of usefulness, and placed him in the very midst of those persons for whose good they are adapted, without intending and requiring their suitable improvement!

It is important, also, to remark that the duty of the whole church plainly belongs, accord-

ing to their several ability, to all its members. All are concerned. Not one is exempt. "The church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men." And every faithful man is responsible for his share of the work which Christ has committed to the whole body.

Unhappily, many fallacies are prevalent on this subject. One of these, the result of a loose and indeterminate manner of speaking, consists in regarding the church as a something distinct from those who compose it. Many Christians will fully admit the duty of the church to evangelize the world, without feeling that the admission involves their individual responsibility for the performance of a share of the work; a mistake similar to that of supposing that it is the duty of a nation to meet its just liabilities, but not of the citizens who compose it to contribute individually to the taxes levied for the purpose.

Another mistake is that of supposing that the whole of this great work devolves on those who are officially called to engage in the Christian ministry. The writer is not one of those who are disposed to undervalue the dignity or importance of that sacred calling. But he feels sure that it was never designed to quiet the people of Christ, in general, in apathy or indolence, as to the salvation of their fellow-men.

Ministers have their appointed work, and so have private Christians. It was not exclusively to his apostles or other ministers, but to his people as a whole, that the Redeemer said, "Ye

are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world." Matt. v, 13, 14.

Another prevalent mistake, is the supposition that a subscription to a missionary society, or the pecuniary support of the gospel in other ways, may exempt an individual from personal effort. The responsibility of which we speak is not to be thus bought off. All the acts and duties of religion are personal; and this forms no exception. How monstrous to think of paying another person to fill up our place in the great congregation, or at the Lord's table! Scarcely less so is the idea that our supporting a missionary to the heathen abroad, can release us from the duty of personally laboring for the heathen at home. The former we are indeed bound to do, as God gives us the means; but not on account of so doing may we leave the other undone. So completely, under God, is the work of human salvation dependent on the exertions of individual believers, that a certain amount of imperfection and inefficiency must result from the indolence or neglect of even one member of the church of Christ. One wheel standing still in a vast and complex piece of machinery is certainly productive of no good—the contemplated result is therefore so far unrealized; but it will also probably retard the motions and impair the efficiency of the whole; it may put an entire stop to all beneficial action. The duty of the whole church is formed by that of its individual members.

There is another consideration which tends

to exhibit the duty of individual exertion. One great aim and end of the gospel is to annihilate selfishness in the heart of man. In order to this, among other means, it sets before us the example of Jesus Christ, "who pleased not himself," Rom. xv, 2; who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke xix, 10; who died for us, that henceforth we should not live for ourselves. 2 Cor. v, 15. In us the great design of the gospel is answered only so far as we are brought to love God supremely, and our fellow-creatures as ourselves; and to prove that this is really the case, by doing all in our power to promote their happiness and his glory. The gospel resolves all religion into love to God, and all morality into love to man. The life of a real and Scriptural Christian should be, in almost every respect, the opposite of that monkish virtue which in the Church of Rome is deemed of so great price; and with which Romanists and treacherous Protestants are, unitedly, seeking again to curse the world. He should be in the world, should share its relationships and duties, avail himself of its privileges, and in all things seek to do good to his fellow-men. The spirit of the monastery is purely selfish; that of the gospel is one of diffusive benevolence.

Such, Christian reader, is your duty; to occupy till your Lord shall come, in the improvement of those talents which divine grace has intrusted to your care; till he come to call you from the scene of labor to his eternal joy. O

that all the followers of Christ may be led to recognize the practical application of such principles to themselves ; that, in the words of the apostle, having " gifts differing according to the grace which is given us ; whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith ; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering ; or he that teacheth, on teaching ; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation : he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." Rom. xii, 6-8. To the church is still addressed the exhortation of another apostle : " As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth ; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Pet. iv, 10, 11.

Benefits of great value will be connected in every case with individual exertions for the good of souls. To glance at some of these may encourage and stimulate the reader. We refer now to benefits realized at present—benefits which are found in the work, rather than to be looked for as resulting from it. The success, in the conversion of souls, with which we may expect such efforts to be crowned, will be considered in a subsequent chapter. It is im-

portant, however, to remark, that in speaking of the benefits to be realized from personal exertions for the souls of others, we take for granted, that those exertions are in several respects what they ought to be. Some of these particulars it may be proper to specify. To be really beneficial to their author,

Exertions for souls must be associated with retirement and meditation. In these, real Christian activity originates ; by them it will be succeeded. The determination to be active has taken its rise in the closet, from reading, meditation, and prayer. In secret silence of the mind the amazing love of Christ has been realized ; the claims of a perishing world have been felt ; the recollection has been cherished, I am not my own, but am "bought with a price ;" the inquiry has been put, What can I do to save souls from death, and to promote the glory of my gracious Lord ? The petition has been wafted to heaven, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" Acts ix, 6 ; and the holy determination has been formed, " I will go in the strength of the Lord God : I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." Psa. lxxi, 16.

From exercises like these the Christian goes forth well prepared to labor ; his own vineyard is not neglected, and he is therefore able consistently and carefully to keep those of others ; and the season of labor being ended, he returns to the closet to meditate on what has been

done ; to seek forgiveness for deficiencies ; to plead the promises of God ; to water the seed which has been cast in.

We have mentioned this particular first, for there is much danger in the present day of neglecting these preparatory and subsequent processes ; of rushing into the field of labor without having properly considered our duties, our difficulties, our resources, or our motives ; and when the work is over, of failing to bring down upon it by fervent prayer those influences which alone can make it successful. If the Christian fall into this snare, his exertions will probably be unproductive of good to others, and certainly devoid of real comfort to himself. Let him remember that his great Master spent a whole night in prayer before taking one important step in his ministry ; and that after a season of considerable activity, he commanded his disciples to retire and rest awhile. He has left us an example.

The object contemplated in our exertions must be good. If we labor for the sake of display, that others may take knowledge of us, that we may gain the applause of either the church or the world, even as Jehu said, " Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," 2 Kings x, 16 ; if we thus burn incense at our own shrine, and desire our own glory, we cannot expect either to do, or to receive good. God may grant our desire, but will send leanness into our souls. Psalm cvi, 15. There will be a worm at the root of our comfort. Mortifica-

tion and misery will be the result of all our doings.

If we seek merely the advancement of a sect, we are but laboring in the fires. Vanity is our object, and vanity will be our recompense. We sow the wind, and shall "reap the whirlwind."

The activity this little book is designed to promote will deign to be conversant with no objects of an inferior kind. It will seek to secure the salvation of poor, perishing, immortal souls, and the glory of Him whose we are, and whom we serve.

It must be prosecuted in a becoming spirit. Not with that proud self-confidence so natural to man, not with the feelings which would lead us to say, "My right arm, my eloquence, my skill, has effected, or will secure, this conquest." If any laborer in the cause of Christ cherish such feelings, let him be assured that his right arm will be withered. God will frown on all his efforts.

The spirit by which the useful Christian will be distinguished, is that of retiring humility, avoiding all ostentatious display; of deep regret that he can do so little to repay the matchless love of Christ; and of absolute dependence on the grace of God, knowing that it is "not by might nor by power," but by his Spirit, that good can be done, Zech. iv, 6; that Paul may plant and Apollos water, but that God must give the increase. 1 Cor. iii, 6.

Such activity, again, must consist with our

proper sphere in life, and with the right discharge of ordinary duties. God calls us all to labor in his cause, but he does not prepare the same work for all. He who neglects his business, and injures his family, under the pretext of doing good, is clearly leaving the path of duty. We are to be "fervent in spirit," but at the same time "not slothful in business." Rom. xii, 11. Let the Christian who would be useful beware of the too common fault of aiming at what is beyond his own sphere, and incompatible with its duties. The requirements of God, and therefore our real obligations, are all consistent with each other.

Christian activity must also be steady and persevering. That which is fitful and uncertain, like the coruscations of the aurora borealis, will produce little good. Really beneficial activity is not the result of some sudden excitement, which in a month, or perhaps a week, will have passed away; but that calm, steady, noiseless effort which the individual, or body of Christians, making it, will be not only disposed, but able to continue from the commencement to the close of the year, and during every year of this mortal life. It will not be laid aside because the expected results are not immediately realized. Though the blessing tarry, the properly active Christian will wait for it; knowing that his labor cannot ultimately be in vain in the Lord, and that in due season he shall reap if he faint not. Gal. vi, 9.

Let such, then, dear reader, be the character

of your exertions on behalf of the holy religion you profess; and we unhesitatingly affirm that you will experience a present and rich reward. Benefits even now accrue to the useful Christian, and to the church of Christ, from the private efforts for which we plead.

Such efforts tend to preserve those who make them from many evils into which the indolent are liable to fall. Deep and settled depression of spirits will rarely characterize the working Christian. Such depression generally arises from selfish, isolated habits. Those who are its subjects commonly concentrate on themselves all their thoughts and feelings. The contemplation of their piety and its defects—the careful balancing of their hopes and fears—constitutes almost exclusively the business of their life. Generally the best advice which could be given to such complaining Christians would be—“Go and work. Think less about yourselves. Employ feeling and exertion for the multitudes who are perishing around you. Your fears and doubts will then soon depart, like the mist before the rising sun.” And even in those sad cases where constitutional depression, or severe bereavements, have produced results which claim the tenderest sympathy of all Christians, we feel certain that at least a mitigation of pain might be experienced in connection with a decided effort to do good.

The adaptation of such efforts to check other prevalent evils is so obvious as scarcely to need remark. The active Christian is prepared with

an immediate and conclusive reply to all those troublers of Israel—the idle, tattling gossip, who has something to say on every subject but such as is really useful, and of every sort except deserved commendation, kindness, and truth—the angry, quarrelsome man, who is ready, for a supposed insult to himself, to embroil a whole congregation or neighborhood—and the ignorant, conceited, hair-splitting controversialist, who devotes his time and talk to the solution of questions which all wise men have long abandoned as either indeterminable or worthless. To such mischievous people the idle Christian falls a ready prey. But he who is actively engaged in his Master's service is prepared at once to say to each, “ ‘ I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down’ either to gossip, or to dispute, or to share in your quarrels. I have now no time, even if I had inclination, for such things. When there are no more souls to save, if we are still on earth, I will consider the propriety of listening to what you have to say. Till then I must work.”

As an act, or rather a habit, of obedience to Christ, such exertions secure a present reward—a large amount of present good. What comfort, what happiness must result from the feeling, “ I am doing my Master's will, obeying his command, finishing his work ! He ‘ went about doing good,’ and I have now the honor of treading in his steps. His joy was to save souls ; for this he labored and died. I am not called to die for them, but I can and do labor. Let

me do it more abundantly. In thus keeping Christ's commandments I find my great reward." Nor do we anticipate that self-complacency will attend such feelings. The most devoted and active Christian who ever lived, said, in relation to his efforts in the cause of Christ, "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me," 1 Cor. xv, 10: and we believe that in every case the most Scriptural activity will be associated with the deepest humility, and that as the result of both, there will exist, other things being equal, the greatest measure of happiness. Comfort often flies the man who is always selfishly seeking it; and is found naturally and sweetly in the way of Christian duty.

The labor for which we plead tends materially to expand and strengthen our piety. In the case of the body, exercise serves to increase the amount of strength, and to protract the reign of health. So it is with the soul. In dealing with the consciences and hearts of men, we are brought again and again into direct contact with the first principles of religion. "Such," we are led to say, as we look on the unconverted man for whom we labor, "such was I once: and such should I still be, but for the unmerited love of God." Penitence, humility, love, and gratitude, are thus kept in lively exercise. Piety is increased; and with it our capability of usefulness increases. The one talent becomes five, or it may be ten. Becoming more like the blessed God, we are the more adapted to do good to souls.

How efficient an agency for the conversion of men is provided in the exertions of private Christians! What an immediate accession would there be to the number of laborers in Christ's vineyard, if every Christian would begin to do what he can! How would the hearts of faithful ministers be encouraged, how would their hands be strengthened, by the cordial co-operation of all their people in the great work to which they have consecrated their lives! How adapted are such efforts to tell on those persons whom the voice of the preacher cannot reach, and to bring others under the sound of the gospel who would have continued to neglect it! What an impression would be made on the minds of infidels, and of the world at large, by the sight of the whole church assuming a missionary character and position! This was the secret of the success of the primitive church. All its members were engaged in making known the truth to others—in pressing it upon the conscience and the heart. Their efforts, made in simple obedience to Christ, were well pleasing in the sight of God, and honored with the abundant effusion of his Spirit. For each Christian now there is the same command, the same approval, and the same blessing. Happy is he who is deeply concerned to improve, for the good of others, the talent with which he is intrusted. He at least will not live in vain. And when all his fellow Christians are, by divine grace, excited to similar devotedness; when all the people of God take pleasure in the stones

of Zion, "and favor the dust thereof;" then will the time to favor the church—"yea, the set time—come." Psa. cii, 13, 14. Then will the whole earth soon be filled with the knowledge of God.

But whether he live to see that time, or not, "blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Luke xii, 43. Yea, blessed are those servants whose concern it is to occupy till he come.

CHAPTER III.

THE NATURE OF THE REQUIRED EXERTION.

"Saying, Know the Lord."—Heb. viii, 11.

HAVING shown in previous chapters the obligation of the church as a whole to labor for the conversion of the world, and the duty and benefit of participation in the work on the part of Christians individually considered, let us endeavor to explain the specific nature of those efforts for which we plead.

There are many ways of doing good which it is not the object of the writer to enforce. The present century has been distinguished above all others by the origination and prosecution of plans eminently adapted to benefit the human family. There are societies for the relief of the indigent; by which the naked are clothed, the hungry fed, the sick visited, and, it

may be, healed. There are institutions for the enlightenment of the human mind, the efforts of which have been already useful in emancipating many from the degrading bondage of ignorance and superstition. There are associations, the one great object of which is to send to the heathen the "glorious gospel of the blessed God"—and thus to inform the minds of men on subjects of paramount importance, especially in their relation to the eternal world. As the Christian has opportunity, he should aid these and similar institutions. Let him sustain them, if Providence enable him, by contributions to their funds; let him personally exert himself on their behalf; and above all—and every Christian can do this—let him present fervent prayers to the God of all grace that his blessing may be abundantly poured out on their managers, their agents, their supporters, and all their efforts. We repeat it, as the Christian has opportunity he should do good to them all.

But it is to another, a still higher, a more valuable species of exertion, that the attention of the reader is requested. It is one in which the conversion of the soul shall be directly sought, and sought by himself. It is precisely that kind of effort which is described in the words at the head of this chapter. By referring to those words in their connection, as they stand in the Bible, we find that they do not relate to the public preaching of God's word by those who are officially set apart for that purpose,

but to the private exertions of those who constitute the great body of believers in Christ; they represent every man—that is, every Christian—as saying to his neighbor and to his brother, “Know the Lord.” The whole passage refers to those happy times which are assuredly coming on the church, when Jews and Gentiles, converted alike by divine grace, shall be together gathered into the Redeemer’s fold, and be made happy under his gracious and sovereign sway. THEN—when those times come—“they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest,” saith the Lord. Then “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Hab. ii, 14. Then these faithful and affectionate admonitions of private Christians shall have no existence, for they shall be no longer needed. But until that time—until those no longer remain around us who are ignorant of God—it is implied, evidently and forcibly, that it will be the duty of every Christian to teach his brother and his neighbor, saying, “Know the Lord.” This, then, is the specific exertion which the writer desires to urge, as his privilege and duty, on every Christian into whose hands this little book may fall, and which he feels assured would, if practiced by all real believers in Jesus Christ, transcend in glory even that which has been called the glory of our age—the missionary enterprise.

The knowledge of God is, far beyond all other kinds of science, the most interesting and important which can engage the mind of his creatures. The inquiry, "What is God my Maker?" transcends in sublimity all others. Science generally relates to the material world; this has to do with pure spirit. Some of our most abstruse and difficult researches, indeed, relate to the mind of man, and the existence and nature of angels; but these are all created spirits. The knowledge of God is that of the great uncreated Being, himself the sovereign and almighty Maker of all others. Other sciences relate to what is perishable—to what will, or at least may, cease to exist—this to what, as it never began to be, can never approach an end. They, to creatures with which we have personally but little to do, or shall be connected with but for a short time; this to a Being who is almighty to save and to destroy; who has the power to make us consummately happy or profoundly miserable for ever. What, compared with this, is knowledge of every other kind?

Of all the inhabitants of earth, man alone is able to attain to the knowledge of God. It is his peculiar glory that he can propose, revolve, and, in some sort, answer questions relating to the existence and attributes of his Creator. We fully admit that his knowledge of Deity must be restricted as to its objects, and limited in extent. Probably neither man nor any other creature will ever be able to understand the mystery of

the divine nature, the eternal existence, or the trinity in unity of Jehovah. Finite minds can never fully comprehend the attributes of an infinite Being. Still we affirm that, however limited such knowledge may be, there is between man and all inferior creatures a deep, broad, and impassable gulf, in the fact that he can, and they cannot, form the conception of a great invisible Being, distinguished by those attributes which compose the character of God. The dog, the horse, the elephant can reason. This faculty they share with man; very unequally we at once concede. But the capability of religious conviction and feeling they do not at all possess. And humbling as the statement may be, repulsive as it will be deemed by the intellectually proud, who know not God, it is true that the study of the divine character is as superior to that of measuring the stars, or of extracting from rocks the registers of forgotten worlds, as the highest efforts of the astronomer or the geologist are to the reason of brutes. Glory be to Him who has invested man with the capability of forming acquaintance with himself, and who has made us men!

But how small and poor the use which is made, by the generality of mankind, of this noble faculty! Look around, and you will find the greater number of your fellow-creatures either profoundly and complacently ignorant of God, or but inadequately and incorrectly informed respecting him. Every faithful minister accustomed to visit the sick, or to converse with

religious inquirers, has met with many such persons entertaining views of the divine Being, which are just as vague and absurd as any which idolatry has ever imbodyed in the monstrous idol she has made and worshiped. And these may be deemed but specimens of myriads more, who are living in the world—in the enjoyment of bodily health, but utterly reckless about religious truth. It is to be feared that there are in the world comparatively very few persons who make the study of God and of themselves one of the chief ends of life. With the majority there are few thoughts of God. They know him not; they hold no intercourse with him. Whoever else may claim and have their acquaintance, they are ignorant of their Maker.

The cause of this deplorable and needless ignorance of God is sin. Sin first disturbed and destroyed the happy intercourse which had subsisted between the Creator and his creatures; sin still operates to prevent its renewal. The forms it assumes are varied. Strange that pride should have to be mentioned in this connection; yet such is the case. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” Psalm x, 4. Never was uttered so severe a satire on the pride of man, although volumes have been written to condemn it. A creature such as man too proud to cultivate acquaintance with the great Creator!

Sometimes indolence—the dislike to all mental effort—is the cause of this neglect; some-

times the mind and heart are so engrossed with the world that there is no time to think about God ; sometimes malignant hostility to him is the direct cause. It was the remark of a heathen historian deeply versed in human nature, that we hate those we have injured ; it is so here. Many men will not know God, but dislike and shun him, because they are conscious of having sinned against him. Sometimes fear produces the same result. The thought of God is terrible to a sinner. They who love sin do "not like to retain God in their knowledge." Rom. i, 28. But whatever the precise form assumed by the evil, ignorance of God, as it is itself sinful, so is it the result of sin. And the consequences of ignorance, in this particular, are of the most calamitous kind. It may have sprung from pride, or hatred, or dread ; it will produce a fear, a pride, a hatred, yet more determined, ferocious, and deadly. The mind and heart of him who knows not God will present either a melancholy calm like that of the Dead Sea ; or a storm of violent and unhallowed passions. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Isa. lvii, 21. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Psal. ix, 17. To be ignorant of God is to be wicked, and to remain so is to be lost for ever.

Correspondent, both in kind and degree, are the blessings of acquaintance with Him. How beautifully is this sentiment propounded in our Lord's own words ! "This is life eternal, that

they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John xvii, 3. How insipid, how foolish the attempt of some good people to improve this sublime language by quoting it, "That they might know thee aright," etc.! To know wrongly, is an absurdity. To be incorrectly informed on any subject, or but inadequately acquainted with it, is ignorance, not wrong knowledge. To know God is life eternal. "Acquaint now thyself with him," it was said of old, "and be at peace." Job xxii, 21. A man has only to know God, and all just cause of fear, agitation, distress, and enmity, will vanish from the mind. Thoughts such as the following are cherished by those who know him: "How holy is He! and that attribute which angels reverence, adore, and celebrate, endears him to my heart. He is inflexibly just; then he can never do wrong to me—to any. 'The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works,' Psa. cxlv, 9; 'God is love.' John iv, 8. In him is infinite compassion toward our fallen race, or he had not given his Son to die for our redemption, John iii, 16; compassion toward me or I had never been led to love or trust him. 1 John iv, 19. What fidelity does he display in all his covenant engagements! What omnipotence to guard and bless his people! I now perceive that he is angry with none, terrible to none, but those who love their worst foes, and rush determinately on their own destruction. I am not now—praised be his grace!—of tha

number. Then is there everything in the blessed God which should lead me to feel that peace 'which passeth all understanding.' They who know his name will put their trust in him, *Psa.* ix, 10; and they who trust will love; and they who love will have peace; and that peace will keep their hearts unto life eternal. Happy, happy hour, in which I was first led to desire and to attain the knowledge of God!" Dear reader, pause! and ask whether this be a transcript of your experience. It ought to be, if you profess and call yourself a Christian.

To direct his fellow-men to this knowledge, which he finds so beneficial to himself, to urge on them suitable motives, and to assist them in its attainment, are the several branches of that exertion which we hold to be the duty and the privilege of every Christian. Too often the people of Christ have been satisfied with attempting and achieving far less than this. In visiting the poor and ignorant they have not unfrequently contented themselves with urging an outward reformation of conduct,—for instance, in regard to the observance of the sabbath, or to abstinence from incentives to intoxication. Or they have entreated the object of their concern to come to the house of prayer, and deemed their obligations to the perishing sinner discharged when they have obtained a promise in accordance with their wishes. Or they have, it may be, directed him to prayer, while certain that his aversion from God, his pride and worldliness, his unbelief in Christ,

remain the same as ever. All such directions, to attend the sanctuary, to reverence the sabbath, to be sober and chaste, and to pray for forgiveness, are both right and necessary when confined to their proper place. But they are secondary, not primary, things. Following the principles of the New Testament, we perceive that the immediate and paramount duty of every sinner is to believe in Christ that he may be saved. Acts xvi, 31. "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," were the primary topics of the apostles' ministry. Acts xx, 21. We can be safe only as we tread in the steps of these inspired men. It must be our immediate duty, therefore, to direct to repentance and faith—in other words, to the knowledge of God in Christ—those unregenerate persons with whom we have to do. Any recommendation of ours by which a sinner is induced to delay compliance with the great requisition—to imagine that he has done something by which his soul may be blessed, while yet he remains at a distance from God in Christ—is both deceptive and mischievous, even although it be a recommendation to break off some sin, or to discharge some real duty. The language of a late eminent divine, although intended to apply to the public preaching of Christ's ministers, is equally applicable to the private admonitions of his people: "Whither can sinners go? and what must they do? All the answers, which the Scriptures warrant us

to make, are included in the warnings and invitations of the gospel. ‘Repent ye, and believe the gospel,’ Mark i, 15; ‘Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,’ Acts iii, 19; ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,’ Acts xvi, 31; ‘Deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.’

“If the answer be, ‘We cannot comply with these things; our hearts are too hard; advise us to anything else, and we will hearken;’—if this, or something like it, should be the answer, the servant of God—having warned them that what they call their incapacity is no other than a wicked aversion to God and goodness; that they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, and that their blood will be upon their own heads—must there leave them. His soul may weep in secret places for them; but it is at his peril to compromise the matter. If, seeing they cannot find it in their hearts to comply with the invitations of the gospel, he should offer any directions which imply that their inability is of such a kind as to afford them any excuse—directions which imply that it is not their immediate duty to repent and return to God by Jesus Christ—any directions which may descend within the compass of their inclinations—let him look to it! they may be pleased with his advice, and comply with it; and, considering it as all that can reasonably be expected of them in their present circumstances, they may be very easy; and per-

sisting in such a spirit, they may die in it, and perish for ever ; BUT THEIR BLOOD WILL SURELY BE REQUIRED AT HIS HANDS."

Dear reader, do what you can to make men sober, observant of the sabbath, attendants in the sanctuary, and mindful of every sacred duty ; but remember that your great duty is to urge them to " know the Lord."

That they may attain this knowledge, you will direct them to the works of the divine hands. The heavens declare his glory. *Psa.* xix, 1. Wisdom, and goodness, and power are displayed through the whole creation. You will put into their hands his blessed book. This is the revelation of himself. Here his whole character is disclosed—so far, at least, as he has seen fit to disclose it to mortal men—so far, too, as they need to understand it in order to the attainment of eternal life. No person who is unacquainted with the statements of Scripture respecting God and man, can " know " his Maker. Above all, you will point them to the cross of Jesus Christ. The man Christ Jesus, who was crucified, " is the image of the invisible God." *Col.* i, 15. He is God " manifest in the flesh," *1 Tim.* iii, 16 ; to show us what God is, and what in our measure we ought to be. " God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." *2 Cor.* iv, 6. He who deals faithfully with his unconverted fellow-creatures will direct—will entreat them

to believe in Christ, that they may know and love God. He will remind them of their sin, and misery, and danger while they continue without God in the world, because "without Christ." Eph. ii, 12. He will beseech them, first of all, to accept God's free mercy on his own terms—that is, by faith in Christ Jesus; and then to be much in intercourse with God, by reading, meditation, and prayer. He will remind them that, to be satisfactory, such intercourse must be most frank and unsuspicious. They must dismiss from their minds all those calumnies which a wicked heart, an adverse world, or a lying devil, have uttered respecting the greatest and best of beings. They must yield themselves up to Christ most implicitly; to receive his atonement as the High priest—his teaching as the great Prophet—his dominion as the universal King; to be molded according to his own will, and in his own time brought to heavenly bliss. Thus will they form an acquaintance with God which can never terminate, and which will be to them a constant source of safety and of peace.

The course we have thus recommended is one which will be found applicable to every variety of character and of circumstance.

Should the Christian laborer be brought into contact with a disappointed man of the world, he may address him in language such as this: "You have tried, dear friend, all that the world can proffer; you have amassed its wealth, been conversant with its pleasures, and stood adorned

with its honors. You have tried its all, and you have found it to be vanity, deception, sorrow. With an aching heart you have come from its empty, broken cisterns. Let me entreat you to leave these things for ever. Do not stay to wonder at their failure. Leave them, and become acquainted with God in Christ. Know him as well as you have known them, and that peace to which you are as yet a stranger, and for which you long, will sweetly flow into your expanded bosom. Forgiveness and eternal life will be yours."

Or, addressing an anxious inquirer, he may say: "I can well understand your deep solicitude. I can sympathize in your sorrow. I can also tell you of peace through Christ Jesus. In coming to him, let all your anxiety terminate. At the foot of his cross all your cares may be buried. To know God in Christ is all you need to make you happy. Know him, then, 'and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind:—if thou seek him, he will be found of thee.' 1 Chron. xxviii, 9. Long you have wearied yourself in the fires—long you have been seeking to fit yourself for an interest in God. Abandon the vain and sinful attempt. Come to him just as you are. Know him as he is; so will you be safe and happy."

The Christian laborer may occasionally meet with persons conscience-stricken, and bowed down under a sense of sin, who will be found prepared to put aside all such consoling remarks as we have supposed addressed to the anxious

inquirer. "True," they may say, "for others to know God is to find peace; but not so for me. The more intimate and extensive my acquaintance with such a Being, the greater must be my terror. Against a sinner such as I, all his attributes, even those of pity and of love, must be enlisted." "Not such," may the Christian reply—"Not such is the case. Do not judge of God by yourself. His ways are not as your ways, nor are your thoughts as his thoughts. Isa. lv, 8. It is the great message of the gospel, that God is revealed, and reconciled—reconciled to you. 2 Cor. v, 18–21. Your submission to him, and upon his terms, alone is wanting. You have the promise of forgiveness, through Jesus Christ, for all your sins, whatever they may have been. Know, then, God. Plead his promise. Take the forgiveness. All heaven will from that moment be yours."

A beautifully touching fact, from the life of Harlan Page,* will serve to illustrate the manner in which these simple but Scriptural efforts are adapted to tell on the hearts of men. "But for Mr. Page," said a pious mechanic, subsequently to the death of that good man, "I should probably have sunk into a miserable eternity." He was asked to relate the circumstances, and thus replied:—

"On New-year's day, 1827 or 1828, which was Monday, I reflected that I had never at-

* Published by the Religious Tract Society.

tended a monthly concert of prayer in this city, and determined that, for once, I would go. I went early, found only the sexton in the room, and sat down. Soon there came in a plain man, who spoke very pleasantly to the sexton, and then coming and sitting by my side, after a kind salutation, said, 'I trust you love the Saviour?' The question instantly filled my eyes with tears. I had been preached to, at arms' length, all my days in New-Hampshire; but this was the first time in my life that ever a Christian thus kindly and directly put such a question to my heart. We conversed considerably together; in the course of which, at his request, I gave him my name and residence. The next day he came to my shop, and brought me the tract 'The Way to be Saved,' which he thought I should like to read. He called again and again. I became interested in him, and the next sabbath joined his sabbath school; was brought, as I hope, to Christ, and soon united with the church."

Christian reader! go and do likewise. Estimate well your responsibility in this matter. If there be one unregenerate person in this world to whom you have the opportunity of communicating the saving knowledge of Christ, never, until either he or yourself have become the tenant of a sepulchre, can you be released from the duty of seeking his eternal welfare. And are there not many such? You have possibly a partner in life, or a child, living without God in the world. Are you in the habit of

kindly, faithfully, and judiciously reasoning with that beloved relative on that which is of the first importance? Or if, happily, your own household be united by faith in Christ, have you no neighbors who are still the servants of sin? Do you pass none in the streets to whom the tract might be inoffensively and advantageously given? Let the writer beseech you to make the effort. The awkwardness and difficulty you dread will be less than you suppose, and will soon entirely vanish. Begin at the point nearest home, and gradually work outward as time and ability permit. This will be found the most easy and efficient method of laboring for souls. This is the true principle of Christian missions.

You may anticipate much real good as the result of such efforts. But should your exertions be blessed to the eternal salvation of but one soul, even this will be an amply sufficient, and glorious recompense. "He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." James v, 20.

CHAPTER IV.

REQUISITES FOR SUCCESSFUL EXERTION.

“Thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”—2 Tim. iii, 17.

ON reviewing what has been advanced in the previous chapters on the nature and obligation of individual efforts for the good of souls, the reader may be disposed to ask, “Are, then, all persons who profess and call themselves Christians called thus to labor? Are all who are real Christians equally qualified for the work, or likely to be equally useful in it?”

To each of these questions we reply, most unhesitatingly, in the negative. There are those who may be running unsent, if they begin to urge on men the knowledge of God; there are others on whom indeed the work properly devolves, but who are most inadequately fitted for its due discharge. In any company of Christians there may be found, probably, many degrees of preparedness for such engagements, varying from the lowest conceivable standard to that of the man who is “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” And, forasmuch as God works by means, the prospect of success which may be rationally entertained corresponds with the amount of qualification in the laborer, be that what it may; just as you may expect to see in the fields of him who has capital, and science, and persevering industry, far better

crops of every kind than in those of his neighbor who is deficient in all these things.

Hence the humiliation which ought ever to be felt attending the conviction entertained by many Christians that they have no qualifications for such efforts. Melancholy, indeed, is the feeling even in temporal things:—"Here are suffering, starving, dying men, and it is not at all in my power to do them good." But how much more so when our inability relates to their souls and to eternity! Yet how often do we hear it announced in a tone of apparent complacency, and almost of triumph; as if it were really a blessing to be devoid of the means, and thus freed from the responsibility, of doing good!

Hence, too, the importance to every Christian who desires to be faithful to his Lord, and useful to the souls of men, of the inquiry, "How may I best become fitted to make salutary efforts for those around me? How may I be 'thoroughly furnished unto all good works?'"

The writer's object in the present chapter is to suggest certain indispensable qualifications—principles, habits, and attainments, without which, at least in an elementary form, no good can be expected to result from any efforts we may make; and the possession of which, to a proper degree, will render us "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The first and most important qualification of all is, true piety.

It is not the name—it is not the outward

profession—of a Christian which can confer fitness for such labors. No man, whatever his wealth, his station, or his mental endowments, whose heart is not right with God, has either qualification, or call to labor for him. That the actions of a godless person—a Sunday-school teacher for instance, or a minister—have sometimes been made instrumental in God's hands to the salvation of souls, we do not deny. But that God has ever smiled on such efforts, or rewarded them by a blessing on their author; or that such a person can be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works," or to any, we do explicitly deny; and that he will be made extensively or protractedly useful we greatly doubt. How can any man really, honestly, and efficiently serve God whose heart is enmity against him? We never read in the dark annals of war of a really great and decisive victory achieved on behalf of his own nation by a traitorous general whose heart was with their enemies. And even the skirmishes in which such a man may have overcome, have only tended to aggravate his country's misery and his own infamy, when his true character has been developed, and his designs have been accomplished. It is thus in spiritual things. How can any man speak forcibly and affectingly of a love he has never himself felt? It is one of the fundamental principles of eloquence, whether public or private, that, "if you would make me feel, you must show that you feel yourself." Is that man at all qualified to convince sinful,

hardened men of their natural depravity and actual guilt, of their need of an almighty Saviour, and of the infinite excellency of Jesus Christ, who has never been himself stricken with a sense of sin—who has never felt the power of the sprinkled blood, or “tasted that the Lord is gracious?” Is he likely to recommend in an appropriate manner the throne of grace, and to conduct others to the mercy-seat, who has never himself felt the worth of prayer? The man for whom the Bible has no real charms, can you expect him to induce others seriously to give heed unto it, “as unto a light that shineth in a dark place?”

Nor is mere inefficiency all, or even the worst part of the evil connected with labors apparently Christian, but which have no foundation in piety. Awful is the guilt, and awful the danger, of such an intruder into Christ's service. Such a man, while he keeps other men's vineyards, neglects his own. Canticles i, 6. He is to the sinful and perishing around him the herald of a salvation which he despises. After that he has made known the truth to others, he is himself in imminent danger of being “a cast-away.” 1 Cor. ix, 27.

To private laborers applies, in principle, the striking language of the venerable Richard Baxter, addressed to the ministers of his day: “Take heed to yourselves, for you have a heaven to win or lose, and souls that must be happy or miserable for ever; and therefore it concerneth you to begin at home, and to take

heed to yourselves as well as to others. Preaching well may succeed to the salvation of others, without the holiness of your own hearts and lives; it is, at least, possible, though less usual; but it is impossible it should save yourselves. Many shall say at that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?' to whom he will answer, 'I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' O brethren, how many men have preached Christ, and yet have perished for want of a saving interest in him! How many, who are now in hell, have told their people of the torments of hell, and warned them to escape from them! How many have preached of the wrath of God against sinners, who are enduring it! O, what sadder case can there be in the world, than for a man, who made it his very trade and calling to proclaim salvation, and to help others to heaven, yet after all to be himself shut out! Alas! that we should have so many books in our libraries which tell us of the way to heaven; that we should spend so many years in reading these books, and studying the doctrine of eternal life, and after all this to miss it!—that we should study so many sermons of salvation, and yet fall short of it!—that we should preach so many sermons of damnation, and yet fall into it! And all because we preached so many sermons of Christ, while yet we neglected him; of the Spirit, while yet we resisted it; of faith, while we did not ourselves believe; of repentance and conversion, while we continued in an impenitent

and unconverted state ; and of a heavenly life, while we remained carnal and earthly ourselves. If we will be divines only in tongue and title, and have not the divine image upon our souls, nor give ourselves up to the divine honor and will, no wonder if we be separated from the divine presence, and denied the fruition of God for ever. Believe it, brethren, God is no respecter of persons ; he saveth not men for their coats or their callings. A holy calling will not save an unholy man. If you stand at the door of the kingdom of grace, to light others in, and will not go in yourselves, you shall knock in vain at the gates of glory, that would not enter in at the door of grace. You shall then find that your lamps should have had the oil of grace, as well as of ministerial gifts—of holiness, as well as of doctrine—if you would have had a part in the glory which you preached. Do I need to tell you that preachers of the gospel must be judged by the gospel ; and stand at the same bar, and be sentenced on the same terms, and dealt with as severely as any other men ? Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, for your own sakes ; seeing you have souls to save or lose, as well as others.”

Here, then, is the first and main qualification for acceptable and useful labor—real, personal piety ; an actual experience of “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Acts xx, 21,) and of sincere love to him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Gal. ii, 20. These things alone

can fill the soul with real concern either for the welfare of men, or for the divine glory. No person is at all qualified to take any part in the service the church has to perform for her Lord who is not the subject of divine grace. The truly pious alone can consistently, acceptably, or successfully labor for him. All others need to be exhorted to seek first their own salvation.

The next qualification is Scriptural knowledge, or, in other words, enlightened piety.

When the apostle Paul addressed Timothy on the Christian ministry, he said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. iii, 16, 17. Allowing that by the phrase "man of God," he intended the Christian minister, we contend that the principle is applicable to every Christian laborer, however private his station and efforts. He who would be really useful for God must be conversant with the principles and motives contained in his blessed book. This will preserve him from running, as did Ahimaaz, to David, without a message, or with such only as he would be ashamed to deliver. 2 Samuel xviii, 19-33. This will keep him, under God's blessing, from the utterance of a mistaken, or perverted representation of divine truth—from the humiliation and shame those must feel, who, while claiming to speak in the name of the Lord,

are found contradicting either themselves or some clear and well-ascertained sentiment of his word. He who, as a Christian laborer, would "be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,"—"a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," (2 Tim. ii, 25,)—must take this book as the man of his counsel, must read in it much, must meditate upon it more. He must be an enlightened and Scriptural Christian. The instruments he derives from this treasury will always be effective. They are of heavenly temper, brightness, and edge; and will be found "mighty, through God," to effect all that the most ardent desires of Christian benevolence can seek.

Holiness of life, or consistent piety, is the third requisite for useful exertion. The consciousness of wanting this will paralyze effort, and stifle the voice that should be heard speaking for Christ. How can a man rebuke another for defrauding God of honor and of love, who knows that he is himself defrauding his customers or creditors every day of the week? Is the person who can descend to the infamy of smuggling, or, which amounts to the same thing, of buying smuggled goods, a man adapted to uphold the majesty of any laws, human or divine? How can he who sells his vote and his conscience for a filthy bribe, consistently rebuke him who goes one step further; and for those sinful pleasures in which he delights, sells his soul to Satan? It is probable, we say, that conscious inconsistency will keep such

a man silent. But if he venture on the admonition and reproof of other sinners, he will be justly exposed to, and met by, the keen reproach: "Thou makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" Rom. ii, 17-23. All religious instruction will be laughed to scorn by the world when proceeding from those to whom it may be said, "What do ye more than others?" Matthew v, 47.

It may be worth inquiry whether much of that reluctance which most Christians feel to engage in conversation on religious subjects, especially with their nearest relatives, may not arise in part from the consciousness that others know how little their spirit, temper, tongue, and general conduct are habitually affected by the religion they profess. But a blameless, holy, consistent life, is in itself a sermon, and one of the most efficient kind. It will add dignity and

power to every word we utter for the benefit of sinful men.

As the next qualification, we may mention a just and settled apprehension of the value and danger of immortal souls.

We have to apply to others, in this respect, what we have learned by our own experience; to feel habitually what we often feel on the Lord's day, in the house of prayer, or at a well-conducted missionary meeting, or in the privacy of the closet, when the world and all its vanity are shut out: "I am surrounded by multitudes of my fellow-creatures, the majority of whom know not God. They are eating and drinking, and, as they term it, enjoying themselves, just as if they were but the insects of a day—as if, in the infidel sense of the words, 'to-morrow they must die.' Each of them has a soul more precious than a thousand worlds; a soul, to rescue which from sin and misery, the Son of God stooped to suffer and to die. They have before them an eternity of which they do not think; for which they are not prepared. They deem themselves 'rich, and increased with goods,' and to 'have need of nothing,' and know not that they are 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Rev. iii, 17. They are all condemned for sin by the just and holy law of God, and may at any moment be summoned to pay the forfeiture. Before I again see an unconverted man with whom I am in converse, his frail tabernacle may be dashed to pieces—his impenitent and unpre-

pared spirit may find itself amid the dread realities of judgment and eternity. This may be the last opportunity afforded me, or to any other Christian, of speaking to him a word by which his soul may be saved."

Such are the thoughts which should be constantly present to the mind of him who desires to be a useful Christian. They are just. The whole Bible warrants and enforces them. There is, therefore, no madness, as some have thought, in allowing them to influence the mind, the heart, the conduct. There is nothing extravagant in treating those to whom they relate as you would treat one who was drowning, or whose house was in flames. From these sentiments alone, seriously and habitually entertained, can such efforts proceed as are really likely to be useful.

Wisdom and prudence must be mentioned as unitedly forming another qualification for useful effort. The one consists in the choice of right ends, and of the means suitable to their attainment; and the other in the skillful adaptation of those means to the peculiar circumstances in which we may be placed. Prudence is wisdom in practice.

The fact of guilt, the existence of danger, and the means of deliverance, are the same in the case of every soul. Hence, by every minister, and every Christian laborer, the same message, in substance, must be delivered to every sinner, and should be characterized in every case by the same fidelity, the same pathos, the same

love. But a very different mode of treatment is needed in different cases, even as the same medicine is administered in different quantities and vehicles to persons whose constitutions and circumstances differ. Some need to have presented to them the attractive, and others the more terrific, aspect of divine truth. "Of some," says the apostle Jude, ver. 22, 23, "have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." In some cases the plain, pointed admonition is most needful; in some, the incontrovertible argument; and in others, the earnest entreaty. Some may be more suitably addressed by word of mouth, some by letter, and others by the loan or gift of the religious tract or book. Some must be directly assailed, and others more cautiously approached. "A word fitly spoken," and "spoken in due season, how good is it!" Prov. xv, 23.

One or two pleasing facts may illustrate the sentiment we wish to convey.

Some years since a devoted Christian became deeply concerned about the welfare of a lawyer with whom he was on terms of friendship. Constrained by Christian principle, he felt bound to make an effort for his conversion; he felt also the importance of exercising the utmost prudence, lest he should produce disgust and scorn where he desired to implant faith and love. With holy ingenuity he inclosed to his friend a tract on "Self-righteousness," requesting

him to read it, and to inform the applicant whether, in his judgment, it was adapted, if circulated, to do good. He read to oblige his friend—to form and to give an opinion, probably just as he would have studied a law case; but he closed the tract with far different feelings, convinced of the danger of his state as a sinner before God, and cheerfully accepting an interest in the justifying righteousness of Christ.

Some years since, a minister was preaching on the joys of the heavenly inheritance, which is the portion of all the saints of God. Among his hearers sat a venerable pair of pilgrims with their son, a thoughtless, dissipated youth, the grief of their aged hearts, on whom all their pious efforts seemed thrown away. As the preacher expatiated on the glories and felicities of the heavenly world, “Ah!” thought the youth, “this will just suit my parents.” He looked to them, expecting to see on their countenances the expressions of rapture and delight; but to his great astonishment they were both bathed in tears. At the close of the service, when they returned home, a remarkable expression of pensiveness and dejection sat on the countenance of each parent, which the youth knew not how to account for. At length, addressing his mother, he said, “How is it, mother, that you appear so gloomy? You have always told me that religion makes people happy. Now, though you have been hearing so much about the joys of heaven, both you and my father appear quite miserable and melancholy.” “True, my dear

child," replied the mother, "the hope of heaven is indeed enough to make us happy; but the thought of missing you there, it is this which makes us melancholy." The touching sentiment found its way to his heart; he became a changed character; and his aged parents were not called from earth, until on his behalf they could say with Simeon of old, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Luke ii, 29, 30.

The Rev. John Howe once conversing with a nobleman in St. James's Park, who swore profanely in his conversation, expressed great satisfaction in the thought that there is a God who governs the world, who will finally make retribution to all according to their works; "and who, my lord," added he, "will make a difference between him that sweareth and him that feareth an oath." His lordship immediately answered, "I thank you, sir, for your freedom; I take your meaning, and shall endeavor to make a good use of it." Mr. Howe replied, "I have reason to thank your lordship for saving me the most difficult part of the discourse, which is the application."

How much good might be done if all Christians were thus on the alert wisely and prudently to reprove sin! Wisdom is profitable to direct, and prudence must guide the Christian laborer in all his efforts. They will be attained in answer to prayer, and in a great measure as the result of practice. And this forms a pow-

erful motive to the exercise of increased diligence. The more we do for God, the more likely we are to do all efficiently.

Habitual dependence upon God, and on the promised communication of his Holy Spirit, is another requisite for successful exertion.

God will not honor a proud, self-complacent instrument. His must be the glory of all the good in the universe; and whoever seeks to divide with him that glory, will bring a blighting curse on all his efforts. He who says, "My right arm hath gotten me this victory," is not likely ever to gain another.

But the sense of our own weakness is perfect strength. Emptiness is fullness. Nothingness is infinity. To feel that we are nothing, and can do nothing of ourselves; that the blessing is God's, and must come from him; this, combined with efforts such as we should make if all depended on ourselves, this is the source of success. Eminently useful laborers in every age of the church have differed in many respects; their views of doctrine have been diverse; their modes of church government and their ritual may have had little in common; some have possessed external advantages of a high order, and others have been entirely devoid of such distinctions; some have been marked by high intellectual endowments, and others have been plain, unlearned; and comparatively simple men; but all have agreed in exercising absolute dependence on the power and grace of God for success in connection with their

labors. They have thus honored him, and he has been pleased to honor them. 1 Sam. ii, 30.

The spirit of prayer is closely connected with this spirit of dependence, and not less essential to the success of our efforts to do good. In a variety of ways it exerts an influence highly conducive to the results we desire.

It tends to humble, to purify, to stimulate, the mind of the Christian laborer. Those are his best moments, both for his own interest and for those of others, in which he has been most sincerely and fervently pouring out his soul in prayer. Thus he is preserved from that subtil spirit of pride, which, as we have seen, is destructive of real usefulness; thus his motives become more and more refined and spiritual; thus while he implores the divine blessing he is led to the adoption of more vigorous and devoted efforts, upon which that blessing may be poured out.

Prayer eminently honors God. It is the acknowledgment of our weakness, and of his almighty power. In it, we plead his own gracious promises, we implore his heavenly mercy, which he is infinitely willing to bestow. We are also exercising that intercessory spirit which is so pleasing in his sight, and which is a reflection of the spirit of our divine Saviour.

“Prayer,” it has been admirably said, “touches the only spring that can possibly insure success. By speaking we move man; but by prayer we move God. It is through the medium of prayer that the littleness and mean-

ness of man prevail with Omnipotence. 'The prayer of faith,' is the only power in the universe to which the great Jehovah yields: he looks upon every other power as more or less opposed to him; but he looks upon this as a confession of man's dependence, as an appropriate homage to his greatness, as an attraction which brings down his divine agency to the earth." The blessing descends from on high in answer to prayer, "like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth." Psa. lxxii, 6.

Luther was accustomed to say of preparation for the pulpit, that "to have prayed well, is to have studied well." The sentiment must be received with modification. Prayer was never designed to supersede study in the case of a minister, or efforts in that of a private Christian. But when it accompanies meditation in the one case, (and this was probably his meaning,) and exertion in the other, it stimulates, sanctifies, and crowns them with assured success. Devotional habits rest and invigorate the laborer, whether in public or in private, and urge him to new efforts. A life of active devotedness, uniformly marked by the spirit of prayer, and comprising stated and frequent seasons of devotion, is that most likely to be useful. The ministers of the gospel ask the prayers of their people, and attribute to them, under God, much of their success. Even an apostle earnestly sought an interest in the devout supplications of the people, that his labors might be divinely blessed.

2 Thess. iii, 1. Surely, then, every private Christian should diligently commend his own exertions for Christ and souls to the same blessing. Thus only can he expect them to prosper.

Strong faith in the promises of God is another qualification for successful effort.

This will add energy to prayer. This will sustain the mind in seasons of apparently useless effort. No amount of discouragement will be sufficient to damp the energies, or repress the activity, of the Christian who can say, “ ‘Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?’ Num. xxiii, 19. He is able, he is willing to bless the souls of men. His promises are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. 2 Cor. i, 20. His word will not return to him void, but will accomplish that which he pleaseth, and prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it. Isa. lv, 11. With thee ‘all things are possible.’ Matt. xix, 26. If thou speak the word, these dry bones can and will live. Ezek. xxxvii, 1–10. This my brother, my neighbor, my child, will awake from a death in sin to a life of righteousness.” Sustaining, inspiring confidence! If the assurance of hope be conducive to Christian comfort, equally so is the assurance of faith to Christian industry and success. “Be ye,” says the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. xv, 58.

Seek then, dear Christian reader, and seek earnestly, these best gifts. You will find that the motives and the means of Christian enterprise, that unquailing courage, and indomitable perseverance, are associated with them. Success will crown your efforts, and you will find increasing joy in the conviction that you do not labor in vain.

If you feel diffidence in attempting the spiritual good of your fellow-men, diligently inquire, and prove by experiment, whether a more elevated piety, greater willingness to engage in labor, stronger determination to do all you can, and a few trials, would not entirely remove it. And if you have Christian friends who are as yet doing little or nothing for the souls of others, consider them, "to provoke unto love and good works"—exhorting them; "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Heb. x, 24, 25.

CHAPTER V.

DEPARTMENTS OF CHRISTIAN EXERTION SURVEYED.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—Acts ix, 6.

THE words we have placed at the head of this chapter were those of Saul, the bitter persecutor of the cause and people of Christ, addressed in the very hour of his conversion to that gracious and glorious Being, whose sudden

appearance and thrilling appeal had arrested his attention and changed his heart. They imply, in the strongest possible manner, that by his own cheerful consent the entireness of his future existence was at the disposal of the long-despised Jesus of Nazareth. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Here am I, send me where thou pleasest; require at my hands what thou wilt; I am ready to obey thee in all things, and to endure all things for thy sake. I am not my own, but thine. Teach me how I may glorify thee."

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It is a question which naturally arises in the mind of every sincere convert, and which should continue there until it be satisfactorily solved. Nor should solution be needlessly delayed. Life is short. We cannot afford to spend months and years of its brief span in ascertaining what our spiritual calling, and what our capabilities, may be; or in the formation of plans, and the adoption of resolutions, respecting the future. The youth who has gone on to the age of twenty or twenty-five, hesitating and vacillating in the choice of a profession, is not likely to rise to eminence in any which he may ultimately adopt; and has been vainly consuming precious time in which, had his mind been earlier decided, he might not only have been preparing for his future career, but have actually been accomplishing a large amount of good. Thus, also, it is with the real convert to Christ. He should indeed propose, and maturely revolve the question,

What am I specially called to attempt for my gracious Master?—but he should not protract its consideration so long as to afford room for the painful suspicion that he wishes to make that consideration the cloak for slothfulness.

The field of Christian usefulness is of vast extent. The means of saying to our brethren and to our neighbors, "Know the Lord," are exceedingly varied. And it is important for each private Christian to know and to feel that he cannot do everything. He is not required to perform a part of all the duties which devolve on the church as a whole; neither, indeed, would he be warranted in attempting it. Every scholar knows that there are some branches of knowledge he must leave untouched, and others at which he can but hastily glance, or that his time and talents will be frittered away, and that instead of excelling in all, he will fail in all. So must the working Christian feel in relation to the several departments of labor. He cannot fill them all; and the attempt to do it will but cripple and exhaust his energies, and cause him to present, in all probability, the sad spectacle of a man uselessly conversant with every branch of Christian duty; always and laboriously engaged, yet doing nothing to any good purpose. It is thus that some good people, who have been in a constant bustle and ferment of anxiety to be at work, have presented, at the close of life, the utter negation of usefulness.

Hence it becomes so important, that each Christian should seek first to ascertain, and then

to fill, his niche in the spiritual temple, leaving his fellow Christians to do the same ; that each should select his work, and do it well ; that each should take as his motto the language of the apostle, used, however, with reference to another branch of Christian duty, " One thing I do ;" that while neglecting no opportunity of doing good which the providence of God may afford, he may yet feel, " this one thing forms my special vocation. Whatever else I may have to pass by, I must give to this all the time, the influence, the energy I can command." Thus will " division of labor," with its well-known advantages, be secured. Thus, as in the case of the wall of Jerusalem, the church will be built up, while each man labors before his own door. Neh. iii.

How, then, may individual Christians be enabled to ascertain the peculiar sphere of exertion which their divine Saviour would have them to occupy ? The writer would venture to suggest the following criteria, as generally found sufficient for this purpose.

The leadings of divine Providence must be attentively watched. Each for himself should carefully regard them. These have most conclusively shut the door of ministerial, and that of missionary, labor upon some who were desirous of entering in ; and have as clearly led others in ways they knew not, (and while they meant it not, neither did their " heart think so," Isa. x, 7,) through those very doors.

There are some whom Providence has fixed

in the responsible relation of the parent, to whose charge it has intrusted young and untutored souls, and whom, but especially in the case of mothers, it has thus precluded from the possibility of doing many things for the glory of God and the good of souls, in which otherwise they would have been called to engage.

Others, again, there are, whom Providence has placed in dependent stations, and whose time is almost, if not entirely, at the disposal of others. Such persons have no moral right to consume, even in the best of services, the time which has been bought by their employer, unless with his full cognizance and approval.

In all these and similar cases, an evident intimation of duty may be gathered from the outward circumstances in which God has placed us.

Then the natural bias of the heart is not at any time to be despised ; and when it harmonizes with the circumstances in which we are placed, it may be regarded as important evidence of our duty : " For what kind of exertion," each should ask, " have I most affinity ? for what class of persons am I led to feel the deepest interest, to cherish the most intense concern ? Whose condition, in his sinful state, weighs the most heavily on my mind ? "

Such an inquiry should be put ; for the feelings to which it relates often constitute the direct call of divine authority and love, to arise and labor for that person or class of persons. In any enterprise, it is of the greatest import-

ance to have the mind and heart thoroughly interested. This is, in truth, the secret of success. The prosperous man, in any pursuit, is almost always an enthusiast ; and not the less so, because he may manifest perfect calmness and self-possession. He prospers, because his mind and hands are under the direction of a willing heart. The Christian laborer, to be useful, must love his work ; and hence, peculiar affection for any department on which the providence of God does not prevent our entering, may be construed into a call upon us to labor there. The reader will remark that there is a wide difference between the principle we have thus laid down, and any which can affect the conduct of those slothful Christians who are lost in a perpetual dream about what they wish to do, and what they would do, if circumstances permitted ; while, at the same time, what circumstances do permit they never attempt. Because they cannot do what they would, they will not do what they can. For such persons we have neither sympathy nor apology to offer. But where there is a desire of the heart for any particular branch of labor concurrent with providential circumstances pointing to it, there is a doubly powerful call to activity in that direction.

Next, we should endeavor to estimate aright our own natural adaptation—to inquire into the peculiar class of labors for which we are fitted by the talents with which the God of providence and grace has been pleased to endow us. These,

we need not say, differ greatly, both in kind and in degree, in different Christians. To some He gives five talents; to others two; and to others one. Matt. xxv, 15. Each should seek to ascertain the character of those means of usefulness with which he is intrusted. Inquiries such as the following will be found useful in guiding us to that sphere of labor our Master has designed us to occupy: "Have I had the benefits of a good education? Do I possess habits of business, by which I might be enabled to originate and direct plans of Christian usefulness—others being engaged in carrying them out? Am I naturally, and on other subjects, timid or confident, hesitating or eloquent? What is my station in the world? What class in society am I best adapted to influence?" Inquiries of the class to which these belong will be found most useful in conducting us to right conclusions, not only as to the persons on whom we are most likely to tell with advantage in our efforts to do good, but as to the means by which we may most reasonably expect to reach their hearts. An indirect and personal advantage resulting from their prosecution will be experienced in the encouragement thus afforded to the work of self-examination—the habitual inspection of everything connected with ourselves in our relation to the great God our Maker, to the world in which we dwell, and to the eternity toward which we are hastening.

The opinion of candid and judicious Chris-

tian friends should sometimes be sought. No Christian minister would seek to dictate, but all would be ready to advise. So would any kind and intelligent Christian friend; and modesty will often suggest the propriety of asking their counsel. Others are sometimes able to judge far more accurately of our abilities than we can be; and one faithful remark from such a friend may correct some of the gross misconceptions we are apt to form when sitting in judgment on ourselves. Vanity and self-complacency are so lamentably common to man, that every wise person will rejoice to have the benefit of another's eyes in forming an estimate of his own powers. Our responsibility, moreover, is greatly diminished when we act under the advice of those competent, both mentally and spiritually, to aid us in determining what we ought to do.

Finally: prayer and its results will form the grand criterion. If all the other means of decision to which we have referred be present, if they all combine to conduct to one conclusion, still this must not be neglected. In their partial, or even total absence—supposing the case to occur—this would more than supply their place. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James i, 5. Make it, dear reader, if you have not as yet been conducted to decision, the subject of humble, fervent, persevering prayer, that you may be directed aright. Morning and evening be it yours to inquire at the throne of grace,

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” This course will not fail in securing for you such direction from on high as shall be abundantly sufficient for your purpose. And happy will you be, if, knowing your Lord’s will, you have grace also to do it.

Let us now proceed to survey some of the chief departments of labor in which the private Christian may advantageously engage. It is supposed, that by some such process as we have described the reader has arrived at the knowledge of that precise class of efforts to which the providence and grace of God have combined to call him; and in the spirit of Christian affection, and with all humility, it is desired to offer a few hints by which he may find himself in some measure aided in the discharge of his important duties—duties the ultimate design of which is to secure the salvation of souls, and the promotion of God’s glory.

And, in the first place, it may be well to address a few words to the Christian parent. The Christian who has been called to sustain this interesting and endearing relation has no choice in regard to one of the chief departments of holy activity. Next to the salvation of his own soul, that of his beloved offspring must be the great concern of his life. “Take this child—and nurse it for me,” (Exod. ii, 9,) are words which, although not originally bearing at all on this subject, have often been applied, and not inappropriately or unjustifiably, as the language of Christ to the parent; the charge which that

gracious Saviour addresses when he commits a young immortal to the care of those who thus enter on a new responsibility, and one more important than any they had previously sustained.

The remark may strike at some things which have been unhappily too common, but we hesitate not to affirm, that nothing can be to a Christian parent a duty which necessarily involves the neglect of the souls thus committed to his care. We have known mothers who habitually left home and neglected its paramount claims, that they might be where they could discuss, or even expound, the mysteries of unfulfilled prophecy, or expose the "carnality" of this or that section of the church of Christ. Their children, in the mean time, were left unheeded, or at least to the guidance and instruction of those who were not their parents—who were not competent to do for them what a parent could and ought to do. We have known fathers, and some who have been well esteemed in the Christian church, whose evenings have been habitually spent in the society they graced, and where indeed they had the opportunity of exerting a salutary influence—an opportunity we by no means accuse them of neglecting;—but home was neglected; midnight often found them but returning thither; children had long retired to bed; servants were worn out, sleepy, and perhaps displeased with the unseemly detention; the domestic evening service was neglected, or most hastily and use-

lessly performed. Another man's house and circle had been blessed by that voice lifted up in prayer ; but the family to which first of all the privilege pertained was deprived of its natural right. Melancholy picture ! " What doest thou here, Elijah ? " is the question which such fathers should have had ringing in their ears. Yet how often has such a course been maintained, until, in a few years, the parent, who had thus neglected the garden in which his own olive plants were growing, has been found wondering at the mysterious providence by which his children have been permitted to turn out ungodly characters !

We repeat the sentiment already advanced, that nothing can be a duty to a Christian parent which necessitates the spiritual neglect of his own offspring. They are, after his own soul, his first concern.

And how may he hope to secure their spiritual and eternal welfare ? Our reply is, in brief, by the maintenance of family religion ; and that in a consistent, lovely, and exalted state. What the Christian parent has himself tasted, and felt, and handled of the word of life, that he must teach to his children ; speaking of it when he sits in the house, and when he walks by the way ; when he lies down, and when he rises up. Deut. xi, 18-21. In New Testament language, he must train up his children " in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Eph. vi, 4. As it was said of Abraham, so ought it with truth to be said of him, " I know him, that

he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Gen. xviii, 19.

This general description of parental duty may, however, admit of more particular illustration.

The Christian parent who would labor appropriately and successfully for the conversion of his offspring, must have a family altar erected, and there, with his family, worship the God of all grace morning and evening. This is absolutely essential. There can be little family piety where there is no family worship. We should as soon expect to see children nourished without food, as converted to God in a family which, as such, never worships him. Difficulty, we are aware, is felt by many in regard to this exercise. In some cases this is merely the difficulty of inexperience. In others it arises from the consciousness of inability to engage in extemporaneous prayer. Let them by no means neglect on this account the exercise altogether. Many admirable volumes have been prepared for the assistance of the timid and ignorant. Let the aid of one of these be sought;* whether for a time or for a permanency we leave to their own conscience and feelings to determine. Doubtless the minister of Christ, to whose pas-

* We should prefer the reading of an appropriate prayer to no prayer at all; but we believe this will seldom be necessary to him whose mind the Spirit of God has enlightened and warmed.—*American Editor*.

toral care the Christian perplexed on this subject is committed, will gladly direct his choice, and feel happiness in commencing the worship of God in the house or cottage of one who is desirous of acknowledging God in all his ways. Prov. iii, 6. But whatever the difficulty, it must be met by those who wish faithfully to discharge the duties of Christian parents.

In the next place—religious instruction must be carefully communicated. This is a duty often urged in the sacred volume on those who are really the people of God. “He appointed a law in Israel which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them (the wonderful works of God) known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.” Psa. lxxviii, 5–7. “The father to the children,” said pious Hezekiah, “shall make known thy truth.” Isa. xxxviii, 19.

Never was there a time when the exhibition of a sound, Scriptural education, was of greater importance than at the present moment. The truths which reformers elicited from the good word of God, which they everywhere proclaimed, and for which they gladly bled, ought to be familiar household words with our rising race. that they may be preserved from the forms of error which abound on every hand. Let the Bible be the parent’s text book. Let the methods

employed for directing to it the attention of children be appropriate and graceful. Let its study be not a task, but a pleasure. And thus let the youthful mind be early saturated with that truth which, under God's blessing, sanctifies the soul. John xvii, 3.

Religious inquiry should be encouraged. It was supposed that the youthful Israelites would ask, "What mean ye by this service?" Exod. xii, 26; and their parents are directed to afford them satisfactory information. Such should still be the conduct of pious parents. They should themselves cultivate habits of reading and thought, that they may be prepared intelligently and usefully to answer the inquiries of their children. So will their youthful minds be well informed; and they will be early taught to think, and especially to think on religious subjects.

Religious entreaty should be employed. If parents really wish their children to be converted, they must, from a very early period, begin to talk with them alone on the subject of personal piety. They must pray for them, pray with them, and, it may be added, they must pray them "in Christ's stead" to be "reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v, 20. Adopting the very language of Scripture, they may say, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding." "My son—receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee." Psa.

xxxiv, 11 ; Prov. iv, 1 ; ii, 1. Let the reader, if he had a pious parent, consult his own heart, and inquire whether such entreaties do not cleave to the soul ; attending it through life ; recommending religion ; and holding back from vice even after those who uttered them are gone to a better world. Let every parent who desires the salvation of his child, add to all other things religious entreaty ; let him say to his child, as well as to his brother and his neighbor, " Know the Lord."

Let religious conversation be often maintained in the hearing of children. We do not mean theological janglings—hair-splitting doctrinal discussions ; we hold these very cheap. Many " unlearned and ignorant men " have contributed to the destruction of their children, by familiarizing them with such disputations, and with the bad spirit they commonly engender. We refer to plain, practical, and experimental godliness. Happily the family, the heads of which are so united in Christian feeling, that they delight habitually to converse together on such subjects ! We have known families of five, six, or more children, all converted to God. In many respects the training of these several households differed widely ; but in this one thing they were all alike—that by frequent conversation in their presence on this most important theme the minds of the children were early brought into contact with the great truths of religion.

A holy consistency of conduct must also be maintained. All instruction, all entreaty, in the

absence of this, will be useless and worse than useless. Children are acute observers. They soon begin to detect inconsistencies. They will readily find it out if your spirit or conduct be at variance with your creed—if you do not embody in yourselves the instructions you give to them—if saying, you do not. It is, probably, to a child a curse far less dreadful to have altogether worldly, than to have inconsistent or hypocritical, parents. In the one case, he may be brought up without knowing religion at all; in the other, he will be taught to despise and hate it. In the former case, we may hope that whenever providentially brought into contact with truth he may be led to embrace it; in the latter, he is positively armed against it. Let every parent, like the Christian minister, take heed to himself, that so he may save both himself and those intrusted to his care. 1 Tim. iv, 16.

And let the pious parent never forget that he is educating his child for eternity. Let him beware of the foolish and criminal fondness of aged Eli; whose “sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” 1 Sam. iii, 13. Let him beware of the sin and curse, so common to professedly Christian parents in the present day—that of making the temporal welfare of their children their chief, if not their only, concern. Nothing can be more really cruel than to fix a child where there is every probability that his morals will be corrupted, and his heart set against true piety, for the mere

sake of worldly education, wealth, or greatness. Happy they who, in this respect, as in others, seek "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" all other things shall be added unto them. Matt. vi, 33. Keeping eternity in view, and with the fixed determination that whenever its claims really come into collision with those of the present world, he will unhesitatingly bow to their paramount authority, the Christian parent may confidently hope that his pious labors for the conversion of his offspring will be crowned with all the success he could desire. He will be eminently a blessing to his beloved children—to the church of Christ, and to the world.

We venture, in the next place, to offer a few words of suggestion to the SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER.

The work of Sunday-school tuition is often selected by youthful converts; and when the end sought, and the means employed, are what they ought to be, is one of the most useful in which any can engage. It is a lovely sight to look on the young diligently training the young for immortality. It may, however, fairly admit a question, whether the benefits connected with this work should be so much restricted as they commonly are to the young—both as teachers and as scholars. There are still many who have grown into years without the knowledge of Christ Jesus; why should they not be invited and pressed to enter the Sunday school, there to receive the elements of divine truth, in a

form more familiar and simple than the instructions of the pulpit can often with propriety assume? There are others—Christian men and women—who without having lost the devotedness of youthful piety, have acquired, by the flight of time, an experience, a mellowness, a facility in imparting truth, which it is no reflection upon our young friends to say they cannot possess. Should any reader of this book answer this description, we would affectionately urge him to consider whether, unless he have already a sphere of usefulness sufficient to engage his available time, he should not volunteer his services for the work of Sunday-school instruction.

The Sunday-school teacher must lay his account for difficulties and trials. He has to contend with ignorance, pride, and obstinacy in many of those for whom he labors, and the disadvantage of being engaged in the correction of those evils for but one day in seven. During the other six days the majority of the children have, as he is aware, no training at all; or none but of the worst possible kind. His instructions are thus effaced; the influence of his toil is neutralized. He feels the necessity of exercising far greater patience than that of a parent with his child, and at the same time the difficulty of exercising nearly so much. His only resource and hope must be in the grace and power of Jehovah.

In order to usefulness in Sunday-school teaching, one or two rules will be found of

great importance. The great end which must ever be kept in view is the conversion of the soul to God. How much those mistake who suppose that Sunday schools are designed merely to teach the children of the poor to read ! It is felt by the most sensible and pious teachers to be an afflictive thing, that in the Sunday school they should have to teach reading at all. They regard it as indeed necessary—but a necessary evil. They entertain the conviction that, were the Holy Scriptures still untranslated, they could have no manner of right to teach English reading on the Lord's day. As it is, they feel that such instruction can be tolerated only as the means of imparting an ability to read and understand the book of God. Just in proportion as such principles are more widely recognized—as Sunday-school teachers feel that their great and only legitimate object is to secure the salvation of the children's souls—so far, and only so far, is the system of which we are now speaking likely to do good.

Next in importance to this is the remark that the teacher should avoid burdening the memory of a child with the mere words of a catechism or even of the Bible. That which is merely mechanical in the operations of the mind upon the word of God can do little good. The teacher has to instruct, not a parrot, but a child ; to direct, not a machine, but an intellectual being. Let him seek the conversion of the soul by bringing it into contact with the truth of God ;

let him communicate but a small portion of that truth at once ; let the minds of the children be taught to think about it, and their hearts to feel it aright. Let the teacher labor to communicate sound moral principles, and evangelical doctrine, in such a way that they may be well understood, and never forgotten. Thus will the children of his charge rise up to call him blessed ; thus will he become, in the divine hands, eminently useful in building up the church of Christ.

The efforts of the CHRISTIAN VISITOR will be necessarily directed for the most part to the poor, the ignorant, and persons accustomed to neglect religious services. Generally the tract which he bears from house to house will form his introduction to converse with such persons. Where he finds it at all practicable, he should do more than barely leave the tract and retire. He should enter the house, and sit down. He should engage in free and friendly conversation. But, as the servant of Christ, he should come at once to the point. No matters of inferior moment should be allowed to divert his attention from that which is of supreme importance. He must not allow himself, in ordinary cases, to be seduced into argument. He has a testimony to deliver. He has to say, "Know the Lord." Let this be done kindly, pointedly, faithfully. Let attention then be directed to the tract which is to be left behind, to the Bible, to the sanctuary.

It will be found of great use to the Christian

visitor to take mental notes of the conversation which may pass between himself and those he visits. By endeavoring to bear in memory their peculiar states of mind and feeling, with the general strain of their remarks, he will be prepared on the occasion of his next visit to renew the conversation on those principles, and by the utterance of those hints, which the former may have suggested.

It will, moreover, always be found useful to have read the tract which is about to be lent. A few words may be uttered directly bearing on the subject of which it treats, and preparatory to its suitable perusal. The impression these words may make, the reading of the tract will be adapted to confirm.

The Christian visitor who proceeds on sound and Scriptural principles will not estimate his exertions by the number of houses he can visit in a given time. He will prefer taking a few houses, and discharging his duty to their inmates in a suitable manner, to the too common practice of making hasty and inefficient visits to a number ten times greater.

In every interview the Christian visitor should mentally seek divine assistance. We take it for granted that he asks the blessing of God both before and after the work in which he engages ; we urge him now to seek it, often, in the work itself. He may do so between the question put to him by any of the objects of his beneficence, and the answer he returns. How beautiful and encouraging an instance of this

kind of ejaculatory prayer we have in the history of Nehemiah ! “ For what,” said his royal master, “ dost thou make request ?” “ So,” says Nehemiah, “ I prayed to the God of heaven,” chap. ii, 4, 5. In that moment the prayer was inspired, mentally uttered, borne on high, accepted, and answered. Divine wisdom guided the reply of the cup-bearer ; and, as the result, Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the revival of pure and undefiled religion effected. Let the Christian visitor thus pray “ to the God of heaven” for direction in his efforts to do good. The same God still answers prayer.

It may be desirable to add a few words to the GENERAL TRACT DISTRIBUTOR. He occupies a distinct, and wider, field of labor ; and one peculiarly adapted to those who “ cannot speak.” He is engaged in scattering in all directions the leaves of the tree of life. The scene of his labors is to be found in “ the streets and lanes of the city”—by the way-side wherever man is, and is accessible.

For such laborers abundant resources are supplied in our tracts. Those publications comprehend a large circle of subjects richly fraught with evangelical truth. Argument and appeal—principle and fact—doctrine and narrative—threatenings and promises—the terrors of God’s law and the attractions of his gospel, are judiciously blended. Every one of them contains a distinct statement of the way of a sinner’s salvation by Jesus Christ ; “ so that if a person were to read a tract, even of the smallest size,

and should never have an opportunity of seeing another, he might be plainly taught, that, in order to salvation, he must be born again of the Holy Spirit, and justified by faith in the perfect obedience unto death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

The tracts to which we refer are beautifully adapted, by variety of size, price, style, subject, and specific design, to the several classes of the community. The aged, and the young—the ignorant—“those who can read but little”—the sick—the blind—the skeptical—the procrastinating and the self-righteous—the “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”—these, and many other classes, too numerous indeed to mention, have been abundantly provided for. All these publications can be depended on. The distributor may feel assured that they are neither irreligious, like the tracts of Socialism; nor papistical, like the “Tracts for the Times;” nor specimens of sectarian bigotry, like too many others;—that they can do no harm, and are adapted, by God’s blessing, to do great good. He may be sure that so much Christian wisdom and care have been employed in their preparation, that they will be found as free as anything human can be from impropriety and imperfection. Furnished with the tract, the Christian distributor may make a pilgrimage of mercy whenever he walks abroad.

The good which has been effected thus can-

* Address of the Committee of the Religious Tract Society.

not be estimated in this world. Yet how easy—how simple—how cheap—how retiring—is the kind of effort for which we thus plead! Who is there incapable of serving Christ in this way, whatever may be his incompetence for other methods of communicating instruction? One or two facts will pleasingly illustrate the benefits of general tract distribution.

In the town of D——, a poor woman, in an ill state of health, became converted to God, through the medium of a tract left by a visitor. Knowing her husband's hostility to religion, she dared not communicate the change to him. Her health, at length, sinking fast, one Sunday evening, as she lay in bed, she felt unable to think or pray for herself; and at last ventured to say, "O William, what a comfort it would be if you could pray for me!" To her surprise and joy, he instantly knelt down, and offered a most touching and fervent prayer. He was in the preventive service; and while on duty one day, received from some passer-by a hand-bill, containing simply a prayer in the words of Scripture. It struck his attention; he read it again and again; read it kneeling on the beach; till by the time it was worn out he had committed it to memory, and, better still, had sincerely come to God through the Saviour.

A clergyman in a town near New-York, some time since, as he was riding, passed some young females, near a school-house, and dropped from his carriage two tracts which he had previously marked. Some time after he was conversing

with a young woman respecting her spiritual state, and found her rejoicing in the enjoyment of pardoned sin. He inquired the history of her religious feelings, and she traced them to a tract dropped by a traveler, which was manifestly one of the two above mentioned. He was afterward called to visit another young woman on a sick bed, whose mind was calm and composed in view of death, which the event proved was near at hand. She traced her first serious impressions to the circumstance of two tracts being dropped by a traveler; one of which, she said, was taken up by her cousin, and the other by herself; "and now," said she, "we are both hoping in Christ." She had retained the tract as a precious treasure; and putting her hand under her pillow, showed it to the clergyman, who immediately recognized the marks he had written on it.

At a meeting of a religious tract society, at Otselick, New-York, the Rev. Mr. C., a clergyman well known to the meeting, arose with deep emotion, and said, "My friends, I stand before the congregation as a monument of the efficacy of tracts. When a young man—careless, unbelieving, and impenitent—as I was one day passing along the road, I saw a little piece of paper half-covered with mud; it attracted my attention: I picked it up, and found it to be the tract, 'Poor Joseph.' I seated myself, and read it; and O! I shall never forget the feelings I had as I read over that simple story. The Spirit of God sent home its truths to my heart. I

trembled and wept in view of my sins, and never rested till I reposed on the blood of Christ for salvation. If I have ever done any good in the cause of Christ, or been the means of leading any perishing souls to him, it may be all traced to that tract. It has started a train of causes that must operate through eternity."

The CHRISTIAN CORRESPONDENT may do much for God. A kind letter has often told on the conscience and heart, when the most affectionate and pointed admonition, by word of mouth, has proved useless, and even offensive.

It would be impossible, in a little work like the present, to give any advice on the management of a means of usefulness which must vary in every case with so many circumstances. The station, character, acquirements, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, of both the writer of a letter on religious topics, and of him for whose welfare it is designed, are among a host of things which must be taken into the account, and any of which are sufficient to render a style of communication which in one case would be most appropriate and affecting, in another most impertinent and offensive. The law of kindness in the heart, and the wisdom which cometh from above, will form the best guide in this matter. A beautiful specimen of Christian correspondence, and of its pleasing effects, is furnished in the history of Matthew Ralph, extracted from the Forty-fourth Report of the Religious Tract Society.

At a meeting at Stepney, one of Dr. Fletcher's

deacons mentioned the following fact :—A man, who was keeper of one of the locks on the Grand Junction canal, lived for many years without hope, and without God. He possessed a great portion of personal kindness. He had been the means of saving at least twelve persons from a watery grave, some of whom had plunged into the stream in seasons of frantic sorrow. In the summer of 1841 poor Matthew met with a severe accident, and was removed to the London Hospital. After he had been there a few days he received a letter by post, of which the following is a copy, inclosing the tract entitled **TO-DAY :—**

“ You have suffered greatly, my friend ; your poor body calls for help and sympathy, and in the hospital you are mercifully attended to, as you could not be at home. How is it with your precious soul ? Are you fit to die ? Had your sufferings caused instant death, where would your precious soul have been ? Where, my friend—where ? In heaven or hell ? Do think of this inquiry, and read the tract I inclose, or get some one to read it to you. Do not neglect this friendly warning, but attend to it while it is yet with you called ‘ To-day.’ O, what a mercy you were spared yet a little longer ! may it be for the salvation of your precious, precious soul ! the Lord Jesus is able and willing to save all poor sinners who feel their need of his salvation. Pray, then, afflicted friend, for the Holy Spirit to show you your need of mercy—of the precious blood of Christ to cleanse you from

your sins, and obtain your acceptance with the great God. The tract was written by a gentleman seventy years old. May the Lord make it a blessing to your soul. He is able and willing to save you from going to hell, and to prepare you for the holiness and happiness of heaven. Farewell."

This letter led the poor man to read the tract, and the Holy Spirit blessed it to his conversion. He was proposed and accepted as a member of Dr. Fletcher's church. When this fact was mentioned by the respected deacon, he remarked, "Poor Matthew would be glad to find out the writer: all that he knows is that it bears the Stroud-water post-mark; but he knows no one there." Mr. Jones, of the Religious Tract Society, being at the meeting, stated that though he had not seen the letter, he thought he knew the person who had written it. He afterward wrote to the female, and from her he received the following note:—

"My Dear Sir,—It was in the hours of weakness, and during a long detention from the house of the Lord, that I was directed one sabbath day to write the letter, to which you refer, to poor Matthew. It used to be a saying with myself, to myself, on doing any such thing, 'Well, I have cast one grain more of the good seed of the kingdom into the field of the world—that world which still lieth in wickedness.' I bless the Lord he permitted me to cast in that grain, and I praise him still more that he caused it to germinate and bring forth

fruit. Glory be to his holy name that he hath seen fit to glorify the riches of his grace in the salvation of a soul from hell by means in themselves so weak and poor. But I must not forget to tell you that it was one of your own tracts which was thus honored of God, in the London Hospital, to be a witness of his power to save. When I received the grant of which that tract formed one, I selected a number of that description for the purpose of inclosing in letters, and among others did poor Matthew Ralph receive one. Surely it had been a shorter journey from Paternoster-row to the London Hospital; but in this case it seemed needful that it should go from London to the country, and back again to town, to reach the object for which it was designed. Several other such grains have been cast into the field of the world:—O that it may please the Lord to cause them to be fruitful also!"

This interesting fact shows that the mail may be the means of much usefulness; and, secondly, that even afflicted females may work for the Tract Society. The pious writer had read in one of the public papers an account of Matthew's accident, and his removal to the London Hospital.

And now, Christian reader, will you not diligently seek to know your department of Christian effort? Ascertain it, and that speedily, by criteria such as we have suggested; then fill it, fill it well; and God be with you! However much you may do for the glory of Christ,

and the salvation of perishing souls, you will never have reason to wish that it had been less; neither will you have reason to repine that it has not been more, if you are privileged to hear the Redeemer say of you, as he did of one in old time, "She hath done what she could." Mark xiv, 8.

CHAPTER VI.

HINDERANCES EXAMINED.

"Who is sufficient for these things?"—2 Cor. ii, 16.

"THE truth as it is in Jesus" probably never had a more powerful or successful advocate than the apostle Paul. From "Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum," he "fully preached the gospel of Christ." Rom. xv, 19. It was his lot to address Jews in the synagogue, philosophers in their most renowned seats of learning, princes on their thrones, and the common people everywhere. His sermons were always faithful, always evangelical, always powerful. "Mighty signs and wonders" were wrought by him "through the power of the Spirit of God." Rom. xv, 19. Yet this great and good man—this eloquent and renowned apostle—when contemplating the Christian ministry, in its immense importance, its stupendous results, whether in good or in evil on the one hand; and, on the other, the natural resources and powers of

himself and his brethren—gives utterance to language of the humblest kind: “We are unto God,” says he, “a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?”

It is more than possible that the reader has experienced feelings similar to his, and that he has even been led to utter, with somewhat of a mournful and desponding tone, the very words which he has just perused, while engaged in meditation on the principles, arguments, and appeals contained in the former chapters of this little book. He may have painfully felt that there are great and formidable difficulties in the way of his becoming individually useful in the cause of Christ; and he is, perhaps, shrinking dismayed from making a practical application of those principles, by at once engaging in efforts for the good of souls, on account of the hinderances those difficulties present.

It is our object in the present chapter to endeavor, as far as possible, to meet this state of mind, and to convince the reader that if he be really willing to work he may do so with every prospect of success. And there are two or three preliminary suggestions which it may not be amiss to offer.

The first is—that there exists considerable need for the exercise of caution in indulging a sense of the difficulties which are to be found in the path of duty. We may be greatly de-

ceiving ourselves, and, under the cloak of a becoming caution and modest apprehension, concealing our own aversion from effort. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Prov. xxii, 13. If any professing Christian really wish to be idle, without doubt he may find excuses amply sufficient, in his present estimation, in the hinderances which exist. But let him be assured that such excuses will miserably fail him when he stands at the judgment-seat of Him whose love he would not recompense by any exertion in his cause, and whose eyes, as a flame of fire, (Rev. i, 14 ; ii, 18,) will pierce the inmost thoughts. Reader! beware of gratifying an indolent spirit under the pretence of a rational dread of difficulties.

In the next place—it is worth consideration whether you ever knew any enterprise the results of which were at once great, good, and permanent, being accomplished in connection with perfect freedom from all hinderances, all opposition? Rather, have not such difficulties usually been proportioned to the real value of the object sought to be attained?

Thirdly, we have no wish whatever to deny that difficulties will be found in the prosecution of such labors, and therefore in the enjoyment of such success, as we have described in former chapters. It were neither kind, wise, nor righteous, to attempt either denial or concealment on such a point. Much injury has, we are convinced, been done to young Christians

by the common but erroneous practice of representing a life commenced with early piety, as a perfectly smooth, easy, pleasant path to heaven. The painful temptations and trials they are soon called to encounter, stagger their faith, and induce feelings of despondency which a more accurate premonition of what they had to expect would have prevented. Much the same result would accrue to the reader in his "work of faith, and labor of love," (1 Thess. i. 3.) did we tell him, and did he believe, that all will be smooth, uninterrupted, and delightful. He will have impediments to overcome; he will find obstacles continually presenting themselves in the path of useful exertion.

Still it is possible—this is our next remark—that both in popular estimation, and in his own mind, the difficulties which do confessedly meet the Christian laborer may be greatly exaggerated. It is possible that when fairly looked in the face they will be put to flight. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." Isa. xl, 4, 5. He will find that what now appears insurmountable will be overcome with comparative ease.

While still continuing to say with the apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?" with him the humble laborer may also add, "Our sufficiency is of God." "Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph with Christ, and

maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place." 2 Cor. ii, 14.

Let us then patiently consider those hinderances which the Christian laborer may expect to meet in his efforts to do good to the souls of men, together with such considerations as may be best adapted to enable him to surmount them.

The first class of difficulties consists of those which are felt from within ourselves.

It may be found and complained of that the work is strange, and therefore difficult. This is mentioned among the hinderances arising from within; because, unless the person so complaining be a very young disciple, he is but condemning himself. The work ought not now to be strange. Long ere this he should have become habituated to it. He is but acknowledging that he reaps the fruit of past neglect when he tells us that he knows not how to set about the work of Christ. But not further to reflect on the past, we would urge him who thus speaks to begin, and to begin at once. The feeling of strangeness, of which he now complains, will soon wear off, when he makes a decided and energetic commencement, but never until then. He can get rid of it by engaging in effort, but not by shunning it. He must some time or other encounter the feeling, or die useless. The earlier, therefore, it is vigorously met, the better.

A strong, and not irrational conviction of inability to do what we desire, may constitute an-

other source of difficulty from within. Meanly, indeed, should we be disposed to think of the Christianity of the man who did not cherish such a conviction. But to one who found it exerting a paralyzing influence on his Christian industry, we would say, "Dear friend, make the effort. Do what you can. God requires no more. 'If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.' 2 Cor. viii, 12. You know not, moreover, except by making the trial, what you can do ; or rather what the grace of God, imparted in proportion to your necessities, may enable you to perform."

A person who feels it to be his duty to labor for souls may be conscious, painfully conscious, that he is deterred from many useful efforts by a sense of fear and shame. This constitutes, we believe, the most common and most potent of the hinderances arising from within ; although, for obvious reasons, it is not so frequently avowed as any other. Is the reader conscious of its influence ? Let him propose to himself questions such as the following : " Is it right ? Ought I thus to feel toward a religion which is all my salvation, and all my desire ?—concerning which I have often said, ' God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,' Gal. vi, 14 ; and, ' I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ?' Rom. i, 16.

" Is it reasonable ? Have I really any need

to feel thus? Instead of despising, would not the world really respect me more, were I more true to my profession—more really in earnest about their souls!

“Is it safe? Has not my Lord and Master said, ‘Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels?’ Luke ix, 26. O, let me not hazard the realization of that tremendous threatening in my own case!

“Is it a just recompense of the shame and suffering he endured for me, (Heb. xii, 2, 3,) that I should blush to own his cause, or fear to speak his name? Are these the returns I make to such a friend? Can I find it pleasant to reflect on such feelings of cowardice and false shame in the hour of self-examination and prayer, or when I come to die? Let me not harbor such feelings as will prove destructive to my peace and comfort at those solemn times.”

Thoughts such as these will tend to remove this hinderance to usefulness.

Another, and one from which the ingenuous and eminently spiritual Christian is likely to suffer, will arise from those feelings of self-complacency so common in seasons of devoted labor, and more especially when success has crowned our efforts. Such Christians hate the feeling which nevertheless they know to be so natural; and the spiritual enemy with whom we all have to contend, and who himself inspires

it, may lead them to think that they can escape it only by declining to engage in those efforts which have been made the occasion of its existence.

Fully admitting the magnitude of the evil over which they mourn, we would remind such Christians that there is a more excellent way of escaping it than that which their enemy suggests. Let them earnestly and prayerfully guard against it; and in order to this, diligently consider its unreasonableness and its sin; but let them not neglect the duty. On the same principle they might neglect all duties, for there is not one in connection with which Satan may not infuse evil thoughts and feelings.

And once more—the want of a persevering spirit will be found a serious impediment to usefulness. This defect is, alas! too common. That the evil may be overcome, that the Christian may counteract the tendency to relax in useful effort, let him keep constantly in view the solemn principles by which it was at first stimulated. Let him treat his neighbors in this respect as he would himself wish to be treated by one who was rescuing him from imminent peril by fire or water. Let him persevere till the object of anxiety is safe. He does worse than nothing who does not this. Let him remember that his own success and the salvation of his brother man depend alike on the continuance of his exertions. In due time he shall reap, if he faint not. Gal. vi, 9.—Such are the hinderances which will probably be found arising from within.

The second class consists of those which originate in the objects of beneficent exertion. These are manifold. There is the pride which will refuse and even resent your well-intended instructions; which will say, "I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil," 1 Kings xxii, 8; or which will make the direct and rude appeal to the faithful Christian, "Who are you, and by what right do you come dictating to me?"

Sometimes there is deplorable ignorance; and, conjoined with it, an apparent inability to comprehend any idea which you deem important. The modicum of mind which exists is wholly taken up with, and fortified by, certain vulgar errors—certain common excuses, which are supposed to set aside all you say. Every remark is parried. Every appeal glides off without fastening upon the conscience or the heart. "God is merciful"—"I have been a good liver"—"I have kept to my church"—"If it goes ill with me, what will become of thousands?" These are but specimens of those common refuges of lies behind which ignorance entrenches itself, and seeks to escape the merciful appeals of the glorious gospel.

In other cases there is the heedless, heartless assent to everything which the Christian visitor or other friend may say. We know nothing more unpromising, more hopeless, than this. Much rather would we give offense, have the truth or force of our remarks questioned or denied, or even be driven abruptly away from

the presence of an unconverted man, than have the pain of hearing him quietly, tamely, unreflectingly assent to all we say. In the former case, we might hope that the expression which had startled and offended him would cleave to the mind until a change were experienced; in the latter we can feel only the sad and chilling conviction—"I am doing no good."

Sometimes the visitor may find his efforts to impart Scriptural truth neutralized by the suggestion of some metaphysical difficulty—some infidel objection; by attacks on the ministers of this or that Christian community; or by remarks of a political kind.

In these, and in many similar cases, the person who is attempting to do good may feel that there is very much which is hopeless, and may be disposed altogether to abandon the work. There are, however, two considerations which should act as an antidote to such despondency.

The one relates to our own conversion to God. Was there nothing of pride, or prejudice, or ignorance, to be overcome in us? Is not the unhappy person, of whose salvation we despair, a type, in some respects at least, of what we were? Yet are we now the disciples of Christ, the children of God, and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. Are we not living proofs that salvation to the uttermost, even in that apparently hopeless case, is a possible thing?

The other consideration refers to the power of the sacred Spirit, and to the promise of

God's word for the gift of his influences on all who seriously, humbly, and prayerfully seek them. What can be too hard for him? What measure of his grace may you not expect in answer to prayer? Luke xi, 9-13. Only persevere, and you may yet find his grace abundantly poured out, so as to enable you to overcome the hinderance you so painfully feel, and to lead joyfully to his feet those for whom your anxiety is thus excited.

The THIRD CLASS of hinderances consists of those which may arise from your fellow Christians. You will probably feel painfully the influence of that bad example which some are constantly presenting to their juniors in the school of Christ. You may look to them, expecting to be stimulated in your efforts by beholding theirs; and you may find them eager after the world—or, at best, lost in the contemplation and enjoyment of their own spiritual privileges, heedless how many around them are on the road to hell.

In these persons—and they are not a few—you will also find great coldness, and perhaps positive dislike, toward efforts such as those for which we plead. You will obtain from them no co-operation, no sympathy. They cannot approve devoted efforts, which are a reflection on their own indolence and apathy. It is a melancholy fact, too, that in the present day the least sectarian efforts are by no means the most popular. If, disdaining the narrow limits of a party, you are sublimely resolved to

labor only for the salvation of perishing souls, you must lay your account for doing so without the praise of man, and with a very circumscribed amount of human aid.

It may be worse. You may have to experience the imputation of unworthy motives. It may be said that the love of display prompts your conduct. You may be directly opposed. Worse insinuations and accusations were brought against our Lord and Saviour by certain religionists of his day.

In reference to all these hinderances to effort, arising from professing Christians, we would remind the reader that we are positively forbidden to follow a multitude—let them be good people or bad—to do evil, *Exod. xxiii, 2*; that singularity in a good cause is no reproach, but an honor; that God, and not a fellow-worm, is our judge; that the faithful, in every age, have been thus spoken against, even by professors of piety; that God's grace is sufficient for the faithful Christian, whatever the coldness which he may meet with at the hands of men; and that whatever metaphysical or theological objections may be alledged, we have, as the basis of all our efforts, Christ's express command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." *Mark xvi, 15.*

By habitually cherishing thoughts such as these, he who desires to be faithful to his Lord may overcome the impediments which are presented by professors of religion.

There is, however, a FOURTH CLASS of ob-

stacles, namely, such as may be found arising from the providence of God, and from the sovereignty of his gracious proceedings.

From any Christian laborer evident usefulness may be withheld. He may labor long, and apparently to little purpose. He may be ready to conclude that his exertions are not approved because they are not recompensed ; his prayers not heard because they are not speedily answered. He may find himself mysteriously checked and thwarted in that very direction in which he most desires success. These things may operate as a heavy discouragement, and may lead him to feel a disposition to abandon all effort.

In reference to this certainly painful and depressing state of things we can but suggest two or three considerations, which may be found of service in stimulating the flagging energies of some discouraged Christian laborer. To such a one we would say : "Remember, dear friend, that your Lord and Master is represented as exclaiming, 'I have labored in vain ; I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain.'" Isa. xlix, 4. His personal ministry, although effecting all which Infinite Wisdom and goodness designed, must be pronounced, as to its immediate results in the conversion of sinners, comparatively unsuccessful. Should the disciple murmur if he be as his Lord ? Matt. x, 24, 25.

Think that this withholding of success may be "the trial of your faith," 1 Pet. i, 7 ; the very means employed by your heavenly Father to

make manifest whether you really love and trust him, and are prepared to live upon him in adversity. O, let not your faith fail!

Think, again, that that want of usefulness which constitutes the trial may be, after all, more apparent than real. You do not know all things; consequently you do not know all the good which may have been effected by your means. There may have been very much the existence of what you do not now even suspect, and may never know until you enter eternity.

And cherish the firm conviction that God does all things well. His wisdom, and goodness, and truth will yet be made apparent—apparent to all intelligent beings in the universe, and not least to yourself. There may be in reserve for you a recompense—a surprise of the most pleasing order—in the discovery that, unconsciously, you have been the means of accomplishing great good. But if not so, you will assuredly find that in one way or another none of your faithful labors have been unacceptable or fruitless. All will have told in some form upon the promotion of your heavenly Father's glory. "Therefore, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. xv, 58.

The reader's attention has thus been invited to the chief forms of difficulty with which a faithful laborer has to contend, and to the considerations specifically applicable to the removal of each.

Two or three observations of a general kind may serve yet further to comfort and animate him, if oppressed by a sense of the difficulties of the work,

Whatever hinderances exist, the only question to be asked by the really faithful Christian is—"Is this my duty? can I well ascertain it to be such? Then I have nothing to do with difficulty at all. My Lord's commands are paramount. I must work the work of him that sent me." John ix, 4.

Then let it be remembered that the very existence of such difficulties renders it probable that we are in the path of duty. We find the way narrow, the trials many, the toil severe. Precisely such is the character of the way in which our Lord has told us we must walk to heaven. Precisely such are the circumstances with which, from the nature of our message, and the tendencies of those to whom it is to be delivered, we might expect to meet. If we were of the world, the world would love its own. John xv, 19. If our message were in unison with the depraved tastes of man's carnal heart, it would meet no opposition. Our difficulties tend to show that it is from God.

This, then, suggests the next thought; namely, that we are therefore not principals, but servants. It is ours faithfully to work; but the expenditure, the care, the result, pertains not to us, but to our Master. If difficulties, apparently insurmountable, present themselves, his servants must report the matter to him. He will find

the means of overcoming those difficulties, or will acquit them of charge in the failure of their efforts. He does not require of us success, but only exertion. We have properly to use the means, and to leave the result with him.

How encouraging, too, to remember that the Scriptural laborer is all-sufficient; not indeed in himself, but through the grace and strength of Him who bids us go and work, and whose promise still stands on record: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii, 20. "Our sufficiency is of God;" and how richly is this sentiment illustrated in the case of the apostles and early Christians; and, in later days, in the lives of Wickliff, Luther, Wesley, Brainerd, Whitefield, and a host of equally devoted, although not equally conspicuous, men! It remains for our encouragement.

And how greatly will the difficulties encountered in labors for Christ enhance the ultimate reward! That reward will be given to every faithful servant. It may partly consist in ascertained success here; it assuredly will comprehend heavenly bliss hereafter. And, in either case, its sweetness and value will be increased by the recollection of all that has been previously done, and feared, and endured.

Doubly sweet is sleep to the exhausted laborer; and home to him who has been exiled; and the familiar topics of consolation to those who have known the depths of sorrow: and so will heaven be to the Christian laborer, by rea-

son of the very difficulties he has encountered, when—those difficulties all passed and overcome—he shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REWARDS OF CHRISTIAN EXERTION.

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”—Psalm cxxvi, 5.

THE words which have just been read are part of a psalm descriptive of the feelings of the pious Jews in the prospect of speedy return from their long captivity. By the rivers of Babylon they sat down—they wept when they remembered Zion. Psalm cxxxvii, 1. They wept not only over privileges and joys departed, but over the sins which had caused them to be carried into captivity. In penitence and prayer they were sowing the precious seeds of future happiness, and in due time the fruit appeared, deliverance came; they were permitted to reap in joy. The Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, and gave his people beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Isaiah lxi, 3.

How often has the same sentiment been exemplified in the experience of the humble and contrite in heart! They have passed through a season of painful sowing. Conviction of deep guilt, sorrow for their ingratitude to the best of beings, apprehension of the future consequences

of sin, have commingled, and produced a state of mind and heart which the world may have despised as needless melancholy, but which was entitled to all the sympathy of every good man, and to all the comfort he could yield. It was a state, however, which in the moments of deepest darkness promised to end well ; and which has been at length exchanged for the peace of God which passeth understanding, (Phil. iv, 7,) for those joys of salvation to which the world is an entire stranger. Happy they who thus sow in tears ; for they shall reap in joy.

But there is a legitimate and beautiful application of this assurance to the labors of pious people for the glory of God, and the good of souls ; and it is with such a reference that we have selected it as a suitable motto for the present chapter of this little work, in which we wish to exhibit for the encouragement of the Christian laborer the reward which he may confidently expect, in connection with his exertions for Christ and for souls.

Those Christians who recognize the truth and importance of the principles which have been inculcated in former chapters, and who, acting on the example of their divine Lord, are going about doing good to the souls of men, in the first place, and to the temporal necessities, as opportunity may offer, are exemplifications of the parable, "A sower went forth to sow." Matt. xiii, 3. The seed is the word of God. The field is the world. In the spirit of prayer

and under the guidance of Christian prudence, they are seeking to occupy and cultivate that part of it which is more immediately around themselves.

It is by no means surprising that such persons should often feel greatly discouraged in the prosecution of their work—that they should often sow in tears. The hinderances which formed the subject of the previous chapter will in part account for this—hinderances arising from within themselves; from the world, for whose good they labor; from professing members of the church of Christ; and, in some cases, from the mysterious providence of God. The Christian laborer is also exposed to the influence of sorrow, arising indeed from other and totally distinct sources, but which is not the less adapted to press upon his spirit, and to cause his tears to flow in the midst of his most devoted efforts. The trials and distractions which he meets with in the world; the mournful providences which visit in turn every human family; the conflicts which every real Christian has to carry on with himself, the world, and the wicked one; the doubts and fears respecting his own personal interest in Christ, to which few real believers are entire strangers; the chilling possibility that after he has made known to others the truth of Christ, he may himself be a castaway, 1 Cor. ix, 27—all these things, singly or unitedly, may occasion deep dejection, and cause the Christian to shed bitter tears.

But, as the excellent Philip Henry was accustomed to say, "Weeping must not hinder sowing." Difficult and painful as the effort may be, the Christian, instead of yielding to discouragement, must rise above it. His own personal trials may be greatly alleviated, and his mind sustained and cheered, by the influence of Christian exertion; and in due time the harvest will come, he shall reap; and proportioned to his present sorrow will be the unspeakable happiness of that time. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

It will be pleasing and useful to allow the mind to dwell for a little on the sentiment thus suggested; namely, that faithful exertions for Christ, and for the souls of men, will infallibly meet a rich reward. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." *Psa. cxxvi, 6.*

The nature of the reward for which the Christian laborer may confidently look, and by the prospect of which he is now to be sustained and cheered, may engage our notice.

The writer need scarcely remark, either for the information of any reader, or for his own vindication, that this word "reward" is Scriptural, or that he uses it in a strictly evangelical sense. It is a reward wholly of grace. Consequent as it is upon human efforts, in no sense can it possibly be regarded as the desert of those who receive it. The grace of God has produced within us the desire to labor in his

cause; he it is who provides all the instruments, the means of labor; it is his rich and unmerited blessing which renders any of our poor labors successful. Let not the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith. Isa. x, 15. Nor when a faithful laborer is crowned, let him suppose that he has deserved it at the hands of God. His reward is of grace, and not of works.

We may consider it in relation to the PRESENT WORLD. There is, even here, a recompense to be enjoyed by the faithful laborer. And it will be experienced in the consciousness that we are, however imperfectly, doing our duty—that we are seeking to imitate the divine and gracious Saviour. We can well imagine a feeling such as this, and ought, indeed, to be conscious of its actual existence, while at the same time we are at the remotest possible distance from anything like self-complacency or pride. “It is but little,” will the diligent and humble Christian say, “it is but little that I can give to the Saviour, or do for him; but that little it is my happiness to do, to give. Joyful is the thought that I can in any measure be engaged in his service, or promote his glory. I praise him for the ability; I praise him no less for the inclination. The two combined, and in action, make me far more happy than the world ever could.” The neglect of duty, as most of us know by sad experience, brings severe pain to the mind; while the sincere desire and effort to discharge it aright must of necessity produce the opposite

bliss. Thus labor for Christ constitutes its own reward.

In the improvement of character, which will ever be associated with faithful exertion, will consist another part of this recompense. He that watereth others shall be watered also himself. Prov. xi, 25.

By exertions such as we have described, and ventured urgently to recommend, there will be produced deep watchfulness, eminent spirituality of mind, intimate communion with God, and acquaintance with his truth, and the habit of living under the power of the world to come. Daily we shall feel and manifest more of a compassion akin to that which prompted Jehovah to give his Son for perishing men; and which induced the Son himself to descend from heaven, that he might, by his own most ignominious and cruel death, give life unto the world. What a recompense for all our exertions, to find ourselves growing in grace, and in the knowledge and likeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! 2 Peter iii, 18.

The conversion of souls is another part of the reward generally allotted in this world to the faithful laborer. Think for a moment of this; and take the lowest estimate. Let the reader suppose himself, as the result of strenuous efforts and fervent prayers, continued through the whole of his Christian life, made the instrument of converting ONE SOUL to God. Blessed privilege! Unspeakably rich reward! "Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his

way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." James v, 20. There is something peculiarly striking in the connection of the words we have just quoted. The apostle had been prescribing rules for the use of those extraordinary endowments of inspired prayer, special faith, and the power of miraculously healing, which pertained to the church in the apostolic age ; and then, as if apprehensive that some to whom his epistle was addressed might reflect with pain that such rules, such gifts pertained not to them, he reminds them, in closing his letter, that there was something nobler, more enduring, more heavenly, within the reach of all. If any could not cure a diseased body, they might, by God's blessing, recover a lost soul. If they could not, like Elias, open or close the windows of heaven by their prayers, they could bring down by those prayers the influences of the Holy Spirit. If they could not remove those temporal chastisements which in that age frequently resulted from the commission of sin by Christians, they could instrumentally cover the multitude of sins which were carrying the wretched soul to regions of despair.

These superior privileges still pertain to every Christian. A faithful laborer may save a soul from death. It may be that of a parent, a husband or wife, a child. What a change has passed upon it ! It was exposed to endless death ; it has now passed from death unto life. John v, 24. Laden with sins, it was unfit to

appear in the presence of a God of infinite purity. Now its sins are washed away by the precious blood of Christ. 1 Peter i, 19. It is sanctified by the power of the truth, John xvii, 19; and the grace of God's Holy Spirit. 1 Pet. i, 2. Instead of the shame and woe common to ungodly men, it now inherits the immunities, the privileges, the dignities of a child of God. It is on its way to heavenly, endless bliss. And, under the divine blessing, all this has been effected by your instrumentality. What an honor! You may not have splendid endowments of wealth, or genius, or eloquence; your name may be despised in the world, and little known in the church—but you have saved a soul from death. Look upon the person you have thus been the means of rescuing from the pit of destruction; what a recompense for all your toil! And it may be that your success will not be thus limited. Not one merely, but ten, or perhaps a hundred, will be delivered from sin and death through your exertions. God has thus blessed instruments weak as you, and is still able to bless your endeavors. Should it be so, verily you will reap in joy!

The thought that we are thus the means of increasing the church of Christ will form another ingredient in the reward of faithful laborers. To it the Lord adds continually such as shall be saved. Acts ii, 47. He adds to it those who shall be its members, its pillars, its ornaments.

Nor let it be forgotten that there is a multi-

plying power in efforts for the good of souls beyond their direct and immediate result. Each new convert possesses, like the instrument of his conversion, the means of bringing souls to God. Each may carry on, not in one, but in many others, the work which that instrument was permitted to begin in him. Thus the efforts of one Christian may tell almost indefinitely :—may be expanded into results which shall prove, ultimately, beneficial to the whole church of Christ. That church every good man loves. For it the Redeemer shed his blood, and therefore the good man loves it. Eph. v, 25–27. It is the spiritual temple, the gates whereof the Lord loveth more than all the dwellings of Jacob, (Psa. lxxxvii, 2,) and therefore he loves it. And he who does love it will assuredly feel that to be permitted in any way to contribute to its increase and prosperity is a rich recompense for any efforts, however protracted and arduous, which he may have made on its behalf.

The promotion of God's honor is another part of our reward on earth. Dear to every pious heart is the glory of the triune Jehovah. "Thy name be hallowed ; thy kingdom come ; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ;" are petitions we are taught to offer to our heavenly Father. Matt. vi, 9–13. Happy must he feel who is enabled in any measure to bear part in the accomplishment of those pious desires ! This is indeed an ample recompense for all that creatures can do. "Of him, and through him,

and to him, are all things ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Rom. xi, 36.

But there is reserved for the HEAVENLY WORLD a more full and rich development of the reward to be bestowed on the Christian laborer. How little do we know at present of heaven ! " It doth not yet appear what we shall be." 1 John iii, 2. And yet how inspiring and animating the thoughts which at times visit the soul, poor and imperfect as we know them to be.

The writer ventures to suggest two or three thoughts as to the nature of the heavenly reward ; thoughts as to the correctness of which no doubt can be entertained by any pious, reflecting mind ; which do not, therefore, partake of the nature of speculation, and which are adapted to encourage us in the work of faith and labor of love, (1 Thess. i, 3,) to which we are now called. There is, as we have seen, a reward on earth—there is also one laid up in heaven ; and, like all that is heavenly, it far transcends all we can realize below. There, the elements of happiness to which we have referred, as pertaining to the faithful laborer on earth, still exist, but in a more refined and perfect form.

Reflection on the past, as a scene of exertion for Christ, will constitute a source of gratitude and joy. We believe that the greater part of heaven or hell will exist in every man's own heart. How painful, how intolerable, the everlasting thought which will prey on the mind of

the wretched man who—although possessed of mighty gifts, of large ability to make others happy—passed through life useless and injurious, leaving behind him only the achievements of the gambler and the seducer!

How opposite to all the reflections and sensations of such a man must be those of him who has conscientiously improved his time and talents—lived to the praise of God—been the means of converting souls, of building up the church, of promoting the divine glory! Happy, thrice happy, will he be in such a retrospect, while yet he exclaims, “Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.” Psalm cxv, 1. Thus each will be reaping in eternity the natural consequences of what he has sown in time. He who sowed to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, and he who sowed to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Gal. vi, 8.

Grateful recognition on the part of those we have been the means of saving from death will form another ingredient in the heavenly reward.

In order to a state of future happiness or misery at all adapted to the nature of man, it is absolutely essential that there should be a distinct remembrance of what we have been, and of what we have done, on earth; and of those with whom we were associated. Every thinking person must maintain this, by whatever metaphysical difficulties it may appear to be attended. We may remark that the word of God furnishes

several proofs of the correctness of this sentiment : Luke xiii, 28, etc. ; xvi, 23-25 ; 1 Thess. ii, 19, 20.

Delightful is the prospect which thus opens to the active Christian. All the pleasing intercourse he here enjoys with those who have been saved by his instrumentality will be there renewed, but in a far nobler form.

And there will be many delightful surprises. Then for the first time you will fully know that the seed sown in weakness and tears was imperishable ; that it struck root ; that it was raised in power ; that it brought forth much fruit. A word spoken in season, indeed, but with much trepidation ; received with scorn and anger, and afterward erased from your memory, may then be found to have been the means of bringing a soul to God. What an interview between that soul and the instrument of its conversion ; when, after having been prostrate at the eternal throne—after having given all the honor and glory of its salvation to Him who sits there—it exclaims, “ You are, under God, my deliverer ; you have been the instrument, in his hands, of saving me from hell, and of bringing me to this blessed place ! ” What a reward for Christian exertion !

Then, too, we shall begin to form a correct estimate of the real amount of influence exerted by our labors. We may then clearly perceive what seems now too vast for comprehension—that our words, our efforts, our prayers, will continue to affect the destinies of men to the

very close of time ; the multitude of those indirectly converted through our means being increased in every succeeding age ; even as in the natural world the posterity of any one man continues to increase in each following generation.

How little did the pious mother of Dr. Doddridge think, when engaged, according to the well-known statement, in teaching her son the histories of Scripture from the Dutch tiles in her chimney corner, what an amount of good would result from her labors ! That child grew up a good and great man, useful to very many persons during his life ; useful to many more, since his departure, by the writings he left behind. "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," his most useful production, was read by a young senator of the British nation—an accomplished, wealthy, eloquent, and influential man, but living without Christ. The perusal of that book was, under God's blessing, the means of converting to himself the soul of WILBERFORCE. Inspired with the wish to communicate to others the blessings he had himself received, Mr. Wilberforce prepared his "Practical View of the prevailing Religious System of professing Christians in this Country." The book fell into the hands of an amiable, but irreligious young man, just entering, without any real fitness, on the duties of the Christian ministry. Interested in the theme, he closed not his eyes ere he had read the volume through. And soon, under the same blessing, LEIGH

RICHMOND became a child of God—a burning and shining light in his church. Who can tell now many souls have been blessed, and will be to the close of time, through the perusal of his “Dairyman’s Daughter,” and the “Young Cottager?” Connect these amazing results with the simple but pious efforts of the mother of Doddridge. What a chain!—And probably many such discoveries are reserved for the world to come. “Are these the fruits,” many a Christian will have to exclaim, “of my few and feeble labors when on earth? What a far more exceeding weight of glory! Truly the half was not told me; nor could I have conceived it possible. Blessed be His glorious name for ever, who has put such honor on a worm.”

And there will be the expressed approval of the divine Saviour. He regards his devoted people with complacent love now; his approval of their efforts is recorded in the sacred page; but then it will be uttered directly to the individual laborer, and by the very lips of Christ himself. He will then say: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Inasmuch as thou didst it unto one of the least of these, thou didst it unto me.” Matt. xxv, 21, 40.

No really Christian effort will then lose its reward. The faithful laborer shall see and share his Saviour’s glory—shall dwell for ever

with his Lord ; glorified, yet humble ; exalted, yet casting his crown at the feet of Immanuel, exclaiming, " All was thine ; of thine own have I given thee. I have been an unprofitable servant. Thine be the praise, and the honor, and the glory for ever !" 1 Chron. xxix, 10, etc.

Transcendently great, perfectly satisfying, must be such a reward ! Nor does there exist any doubt as to its realization. It is absolutely certain.

The great God, the Creator and Governor of all things, has been pleased to establish a close connection, in ordinary things, between the use of appropriate means and the attainment of a desired end. In the harvest of each returning year we have a beautiful illustration of this great law, and of the deviations—few and small—which are permitted to occur. Now there is one God, and his nature one. He who rules the world around us directs also the economy of grace. The blessings which he bestows may differ,—must differ ; as the subject in the one case is natural, and in the other moral ; in the former an ear of corn, and in the latter a human spirit ; but the principle upon which he proceeds is in both the same. For the attainment of a definite end he has been pleased to appoint certain means ; and he prospers their appropriate use. The harvest is never a universal failure ; nor will the efforts of the working Christian be ever wholly unrewarded.

The attitude maintained by the divine Being toward this guilty world is full of encourage-

ment to the Christian laborer, tending further to assure him that his efforts will be rewarded. We are not seeking to effect that on which God frowns. The very reverse is the case. We desire the salvation of perishing souls, and he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Ezek. xxxiii, 11. He is himself engaged in warning, inviting, and attracting to himself the sinful sons of men. Will he then withhold the blessing—the reward—from efforts in such a cause—efforts for an object in which his own heart delights? And we have in the sacred word many distinct and encouraging promises on this very subject: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” Gal. vi, 9. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. xv, 58. “As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isa. lv, 10, 11. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing,

that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Mal. iii, 10. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Psa. cxxvi, 5, 6.

The history of the church of Christ furnishes abundant confirmation of the truth of these great and precious promises. When the ministers of Christ have been scripturally and prayerfully active, they have been made eminently successful. The lives of Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, Brainerd, and many others, illustrate this sentiment. And so it has been with private Christians. God has graciously instituted a ministry in his church, but his grace is not restricted to official channels. He will honor and reward those who labor for him, whatever their station. One soweth and another reapeth; but at last both will rejoice together; finding that the fruit for which both have labored is gathered in unto life eternal. John iv, 36.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUDING APPEALS.

"The night cometh, when no man can work."—John ix, 4.

HOWEVER humbly confident the Christian may feel in relation to his acceptance with God, however joyful in the prospect of entering

and possessing the "better land" when he shall have passed out of this scene of trial; still there is much solemnity in the thought of wasting years and waning life, approaching death, and the great decision. Life itself is a solemn and most responsible trust; its use is a solemn thing; its close is solemn. Solemn will be its review at the bar of God. The Saviour himself felt all this. Even in his youthful days, in the morning of life on earth, he said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Luke ii, 49. How vast were his qualifications for the public ministry on which he afterward entered! What surprising wisdom! Matt. xiii, 54. What consummate prudence! Luke xx, 25, 26, 34-40. What matchless eloquence, which could elicit even from officers of public justice the acknowledgment, "Never man spake like this man!" John vii, 46. Combining in our recollection with all these things the miraculous powers which the incarnate Saviour was continually and graciously exercising, we shall feel that if ever the case existed in which it was needless, or of small importance, for a servant of God to exercise vigilance, care, untiring industry, or indomitable perseverance, it was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet what intentness on his work and diligence in it did he always display! What deep concern for the glory of his Father, and for the good of perishing men around! "My meat," said he, "is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." John iv, 34. And when his disciples

would have consumed their own time and his in idle speculations and impertinent inquiries, he rebuked them—gently, indeed, and indirectly, but still most effectively—by replying, “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” How important is this sentiment! How happy and useful will every Christian be who lives habitually under its influence! How strongly does it enforce all the reasonings and entreaties of the preceding chapters! Let the thoughts suggested by these words of the divine Teacher be familiar to the mind and heart of both writer and reader, that they may glorify God in the station in which he has been pleased to place them.

God has given each person an important work to do while in this world. Man is not a machine, blindly propelled and worked by the will of another, himself unconscious and irresponsible; nor is he like the summer fly, sent into the world to spend a brief existence in the pursuit of transient pleasures, then to die, and be seen no more; he is an intelligent and responsible creature. To him—to every member of the human family—a work is committed, a work adapted to his nature, not more than commensurate with his capabilities, and of the performance of which his Creator and his Judge will require at last a strict account.

It relates partly and primarily to the individual himself. And because this little book may fall into the hands of some who have not

as yet secured their own salvation, the writer feels it his duty to dwell for a moment on this most important, and in their case neglected, part of human duty.

Man has much ordinary, secular work to perform. He has to labor, in most cases, for the support of his bodily frame, and for others who are dependent on him; and it is at the expense of much time and strength, and accompanied by the endurance of bodily exhaustion and of mental distraction. But however right and necessary this may be, the soul ought to be the chief object of his anxiety.

It needs salvation. It is guilty, and deserving of punishment; that guilt must be removed. It is sinful, impure, unholy; purity and sanctity must be imparted. It needs justification and sanctification—a title to heaven, and fitness for its enjoyment. This salvation must be attained, or the soul of man will pass out of the world a miserable thing. But in order to the attainment of salvation, man must be made humble and penitent on account of sin; he must exercise faith in the Son of God; for “this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” John vi, 29. He must imbibe the spirit, and live in the practice of holiness, for without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Heb. xii, 14. And this happy state of the Christian’s life must be maintained by the continued exercise of faith and watchfulness; by the devout perusal of the sacred page; by meditation on its hallowed statements; by frequent and fer-

vent prayer for the grace of a covenant God; by striving against sin; by maintaining a life of daily communion with the Most High; until it shall please him to remove us from this vale of tears to a brighter and better world.

Such is a brief and imperfect outline of the great work which every human being is called to perform—a work which claims and will repay our supreme attention—a work which relates to the welfare of our own precious and undying souls. Is the reader engaged in the due and diligent performance of this work?

The salvation of a man's own soul secured, he has next to seek the welfare of those by whom he is surrounded. Here it is only needful to allude to thoughts which have been presented and largely illustrated in former chapters of this book. "Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world." "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven." Matt. v, 13, 14; xiii, 33. Let not the salt lose its savor. Let the light shine. Let the leaven exert its appropriate influence—silently, indeed, and gradually—but with certainty and effectiveness. Every Christian has to say to his neighbor and to his brother, "Know the Lord." Heb. viii, 11. Many around every believer are living in sin, and dying in it: and he is bound by the common principles of humanity; by a due concern for the welfare of immortal souls; by the conduct of Christ our illustrious example; by the direct precepts he has given; by the encouraging promises contained in God's book; by a

concern for the glory of him who made us, and gave his Son to redeem us ; by every consideration which can have place here—to labor while life remains in any one of those unconverted men, and in himself, to bring them to him who is “mighty to save.” Isa. lxiii, 1.

Such is the appointed and appropriate work of life. A long-protracted period, extending through many ages, might seem little enough for its accomplishment. But how affecting the thought that all the representations of the life of man contained in the sacred page are of a kind adapted to impress our minds rather with the ideas of transient continuance—rapid flight—uncertain duration—than of the protractedness we might have anticipated ! It is a shadow, 1 Chron, xxix, 15 ; a vapor, James iv, 14 ; a day, soon to be succeeded by a long and dark night. John ix, 4. Let us for a moment dwell on the latter representation. How stikingly does it convey the idea of brevity ! How soon is the longest natural day gone ! You look with admiration on the rising sun ; a few short hours and it has attained its meridian splendor. It begins to decline. It sinks beneath the horizon. The night is come. So it is with the day of human life. “We spend our years as a tale that is told.” Psa. xc, 9. This is true in relation to those who attain the greatest number of years allotted to mortals ; but still more applicable to the multitude to whom is assigned a day resembling those of the natural world during the season of winter—few are their hours

and soon gone. The work of life should be quickly begun, for life is short.

There is another thought suggested by the comparison of life to a day—it is that of unity. There is one period of probation, and no more, allotted to every human being. Let it be short or long—let it be improved or neglected—once gone, it will never return. There is no other such day. If the man neglect the fair season, if he die useless and unsaved, he will never have the opportunity of retrieving himself—of effacing the mischievous consequences of his inexcusable negligence.

Moreover, if life be a day—one day—no reader of this book can have it now all before him. Each is living in it and upon it. With some, indeed, it may still be fair morning; but with others noon; and in the case of others the shadows of a long evening begin to be stretched out. “Life,” says the late John Foster, “is expenditure: we have it, but as continually losing it: we have no use of it, but as continually wasting it. Suppose a man confined in some fortress, under the doom to stay there till his death; and suppose there is there for his use a dark reservoir of water, to which it is certain none can ever be added. He knows, suppose, that the quantity is not very great; he cannot penetrate to ascertain how much, but it may be very little. He has drawn from it, by means of a fountain, a good while already, and draws from it every day; but how would he feel each time of drawing, and each

time of thinking of it? Not as if he had a perennial spring to go to; not, 'I have a reservoir—I may be at ease.' No! but, 'I had water yesterday—I have water to-day; but my having had it, and my having it to-day, is the very cause that I shall not have it on some day that is approaching. And at the same time I am compelled to this fatal expenditure!' So of our mortal, transient life! And yet men are very indisposed to admit the plain truth, that life is a thing which they are in no other way possessing than as necessarily consuming; and that even in this imperfect sense of possession, it becomes every day less a possession!"

Such, then, is the time allotted for the performance of the great work required of man—such is the day of life: short at longest. Already some of it is gone; and but one such period is assigned to man.

Connected with the close of such a period, there is much which the most thoughtless feel to be affecting and solemn. The decline of the natural day diffuses over the mind a feeling of melancholy which, were there no other and far higher considerations suggested by the assurance, would be sufficient to induce us highly to prize the declaration of God's word respecting heaven: "There shall be no night there." Rev. xxii, 5. But far more serious and solemn are the feelings which should be produced by the setting sun of human life—the close of that day in which, or not at all, salvation

must be secured, and good done to those around.

Not to dwell on the thought that "the day of grace" may be brought to a termination by other means than the death of the body; for instance, by insanity occurring in such a form and to such an extent, as to preclude the possibility of attention being given at all to the concerns of eternity—let us for a moment think of the more ordinary method employed by divine Providence for closing the season of probation. Its occurrence is certain. "The living know that they shall die." Eccl. ix, 5. There is no need to exhaust the powers of body or of mind in laborious argument on this topic; the midnight oil needs not to be consumed; no elaborate demonstration is requisite. The distinct statements of God's word; the experience of past generations, viewed in connection with their entire disappearance from the globe on which we dwell; the indications of disease and decay often experienced by the living within themselves; all render it a certain thing that "it is appointed unto men once to die." Heb. ix, 27.

The event, however, which is so certain, is, as to its details in individual cases, more uncertain than any other which happens to man. It may occur prematurely. In the life of man the sun often goes down while it is yet day. Jer. xv, 9. "Fourteen is full as mortal as fourscore." All ages are inscribed on the tombstones in every graveyard.

“Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind’s breath,
And stars to set—but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!”

It may close suddenly. There may be no gradual decay; no admonitory symptoms; no wasting, long-continued disease; no presages or presentiments of death. An unexpected attack of disease rapidly doing its work; an accident, the possibility of which never occurred to the mind, may in the case of any person destroy the remainder of his mortal life, reduce his body to the dust of death, and introduce his soul to that world where it must reap as it has been sowing on earth. Can the reader of these lines tell when or how the night cometh to him?

Upon the statements which have been thus briefly made, in connection with the facts and principles advanced in previous chapters, the writer begs permission to offer in conclusion a few words of appeal to different classes, into the hands of some of whom it is possible this little book may fall.

Reader! are you a real, an avowed believer in the Son of God? Remember that the night cometh, in which no man can work. Do the work of Him that hath sent you, while it is called to-day. Be more seriously and yet joyfully earnest in making sure of your own salvation. 2 Pet. i, 10. Be more spiritually minded. Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, (fortitude,) knowledge, temperance, (self-re-

strait,) patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, (love.) 2 Pet. i, 5-7. Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Pet. iii, 18. Be diligent in using the means of grace. Be frequent and fervent in the exercise of prayer. Read, understand, and feel the sacred page. Examine yourself, whether you be in the faith; prove your own self. 2 Cor. xiii, 5. We beseech you, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 1 Thess, iv, 1.

And, in relation to those who are around you, remember that your opportunity of laboring for their welfare will soon have passed away for ever. Your work will be completed, exhibited to your Master, examined by him, and, if you are found faithful, approved and rewarded. Seriously reflect upon, dread, and shun the doom of the unprofitable servant. Matt. xxv, 30.

He had been simply slothful, and yet his Lord calls him wicked. He is not charged with what Christians commonly account inconsistent or unholy conduct; but he was unprofitable. He is not accused of having embezzled his master's goods, as in the case of another, Luke xvi, 1; but he was unprofitable. He had not beaten his fellow-servants, nor been eating and drinking with the drunken, Luke xii, 45; but he was unprofitable. He had not said in the language of avowed enmity, "I will not have

this man to reign over me," Luke xix, 14 ; but he was unprofitable. His crime was not positive, but negative. It is not said that he had done harm, but that he had not done good. He had not used his talent, but had allowed it to remain idle. Hence it is said : " Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt. xxv, 30. Christian reader, beware of the guilt and doom of such a man !

But on the other hand it is said, " They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Dan. xii, 3. Would you achieve this great work ? would you attain this high honor ? Then must you walk, and that quickly, in all wisdom to them that are without ; redeeming the time, Col. iv, 5 ; for the time is short. 1 Cor. vii, 29. " Make haste"—we use the eloquent and affecting language of a New-Zealand chief—" Make haste ; for their sun is fast going down, for whom you have to work." They are dying around you. A little while, and they will be beyond the reach of your beneficent exertions. O, let them not die unsaved ! Make haste, too, for your own sun declines ! If you would snatch souls from eternal death, if you would build up the church of Christ, if you would prepare rich materials for your own future bliss, and new gems for the Redeemer's diadem, make haste ; work while it is called to-day—work now.

God grant that the most indolent and useless year of your life may be even now passed !

And, for your encouragement, remember that if you are commanded to labor now, you are promised rest hereafter. If the night cometh to you as well as to others, there is a sense in which, to you and your fellow Christians only, it may be said, The night is far spent, the day is at hand. "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed." Romans xiii, 11, 12. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind ; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter i, 13. "Seeing you look for such things, be diligent, that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." 2 Pet. iii, 14.

It may be not improper to suppose that some reader of these pages may feel a painful apprehension that, to him, such appeals as the foregoing do not pertain ; since, although not devoid of serious thoughts or powerful convictions, he has not decidedly yielded to God the life and talents which he possesses. He thinks and feels about divine things, but is still halting between two opinions. 1 Kings xviii, 21. The writer would affectionately remind such a one that the great question respecting his soul's safety can be only in appearance undecided. There is no such thing as neutrality in matters of religion. He who had not entered the city of refuge under the law, (Deut. xix,) was liable

to die by the hand of the avenger of blood, although he might be on the road thither; there was no safety but within the walls. So is there no salvation for any soul that has not actually come to Christ, complied with his terms, accepted his gracious overtures. How long will you, dear reader, delay to do this? We are no advocates for precipitancy in matters of religion; but we believe that in regard to the first and decisive act, that of faith in Christ, the duty is immediate. God's commands contain not one word adapted to sanction delay. The urgency of the case is such as, to a right-minded person, renders delay intolerable. Deliberation here can be but the cloak of a mischievous, and perhaps fatal, procrastination. Hasten to intrust to the gracious Saviour the keeping of your undying soul. Then let it not be long before you proclaim yourself on the Lord's side, *Exod. xxxii, 26*; and yield to his cause, by active devotedness, all your time, your talents, your energies, your influence. Be able to adopt the noble confession of the apostle Paul: "Whose I am, and whom I serve." *Acts xxvii, 23*. Remember that the night cometh, in which no man can work. The grave cannot praise God, death cannot celebrate him; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for his truth. The living, the living, he shall praise God. *Isa. xxxviii, 18, 19*. What we intend ever to do for God must be done now. Awake, awake, then; put on strength. *Isa. lii, 1*. Be openly decided for God. If ever there were times in which neu-

trality could be tolerated, these are not such. Consecrate your service this day unto him. 1 Chron. xxix, 5. And may his grace make and preserve you an eminently devoted and useful Christian.

It may be permitted the writer to suppose that although designed for professors of Christianity, this little book may fall into the hands of one who neither has, nor pretends to have, any hope in God. He cannot persuade himself to close, without addressing a word of affectionate but faithful admonition to such a person.

With you, dear friend, it is not the case, that salvation is uncertain, your state apparently undetermined—that were sufficiently bad; but it is positively certain that, continuing in your present course, you cannot be saved. The absence of repentance, faith, and holiness, place this melancholy fact beyond a doubt. You are not in the road to heaven, and there is but one other world in which the path of life terminates. How is it with you? Are you afflicted and tormented day and night with the sense of your present sad condition, and approaching destruction? Or is it so that you can really take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry? Luke xii, 19. Can you trifle, and laugh, and sport, and enjoy the world, notwithstanding all you know to be approaching?

If you were hopelessly, and by the mere force of destiny, without any fault of your own, consigned to perdition, we could not blame you for

this. It might, perhaps, be your wisest course to select the pleasures most congenial with your tastes and appetites, and in their pursuit joyously to consume the few hasty years which intervene between the present moment and everlasting wo. But this is not the case. The Bible teaches you that you may be saved. Christ is still set forth a Prince and a Saviour, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have everlasting life. He is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. Acts v, 31; John iii, 16. Justified through faith in his righteousness, Rom. iii, 25, 26; purified from sin by his blood, 1 John i, 7; sanctified by his Spirit—you, even you, whatever the number, the kind, the aggravation of your sins, and however long you have persisted in their continuance—you, dear reader, may be saved.

You know what you need in order to real and endless happiness; you know, also, where and how it may be secured. Why delay for an hour in making it your own? "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness." Jer. xiii, 16. "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." John xii, 35. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Eccles. ix, 10. Let

not the criminal apathy which may have been manifested by professors of religion in regard to the interests of your soul induce you to neglect it any longer yourself. Up, then, and be doing. Let the recollection of those who are no more on earth—the pious and the sinners—whom you have known, and seen enter the dark valley, and whose remains you have followed to the house appointed for all living; let the voice of years, the worth of the soul, the claims of eternity, the commands of God, the life and death of Christ—all exert their appropriate influence in leading you to work while it is called to-day. And may the ever-blessed and Holy Spirit, the Author of all good, direct your heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. 2 Thess. iii, 5.

EXTRACTS,

ILLUSTRATIVE OR CONFIRMATORY OF THE PRECEDING
PAGES.

I. THE evil of neglecting the souls of men.

"If it seem a light matter to us, to forbear to deliver those that are drawn unto death, and them that are thus ready to perish, (Prov. xxiv, 11, 12,) let us think what the death of the soul is. It is a tragical spectacle to behold a criminal dying by human laws, even where the methods of execution are gentle; and I doubt not but it would grieve us to the heart to see any who had been under our ministerial care in that deplorable circumstance. But O! how much more deeply must it pierce our very souls, to see them led forth to that last dreadful execution with those of whom Christ shall say, 'As for these mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth and slay them before me!' O, how will it wound us to hear the beginning of those cries and wailings which shall never end! How shall we endure the reflection—These wretches are perishing for ever in part, because I would not take any pains to effect their salvation!

"Consider how many souls, precious and immortal as they are, seem to be continually dying around us. Are there but few that miscarry? Let Peter inform us, when he says, The righteous scarcely are saved. 1 Peter iv, 18.

Yea, let our Lord inform us, when he says, 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;' whereas, 'wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.' Matt. vii, 13, 14. We grieve to see epidemical distempers prevailing around us; we are ready, as Providence calls us, to visit the sick and dying, and could take little pleasure in our own health, if we did not endeavor to succor them as we have opportunity. But let us look around, and see whether that distemper which threatens the death of souls be not epidemical indeed. With all the allowances which that charity can make, which believeth all things, and hopeth all things, which it can with any shadow of reason hope and believe, must we not own that there are marks of eternal death on many; and that there are many more, in whom we can see nothing which looks like a token of spiritual life; so that the best we can say of them is, that possibly there may be some latent sparks of it concealed in the heart, which as yet produce no effects to the honor of their profession, or the benefit of the world? In the mean time, sinners are spreading the infection of their infidelity, and their vices, far and wide; as if, like some illustrious wretches, who have been miscalled heroes, they accounted the destruction of numbers their glory. Can we behold such a state of things, and not bitterly lament it before God; or can we seriously lament it, and not en-

deavor its redress?—especially when we consider,

“What gracious provision God has made to prevent their death! Is there not balm in Gilead? Is there not a Physician there? Jer. viii, 22; even this ‘glorious gospel of the blessed God,’ whose efficacy we have so often heard of and seen; and shall they yet perish? Adored be the riches of divine grace! we know, and it is infinitely the most important part of all our knowledge, that there is a rich and free pardon proclaimed to all that will sue it out, and accept the benefit in a proper, that is a grateful, manner; for cordial acceptance and real gratitude are all it demands. One would expect the tidings should be as life from the dead; but we see how coldly they are received; how shamefully they are slighted; how generally, yea, how obstinately, they are rejected. And what is the consequence to multitudes? Refusing to believe on the Son of God, they shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them, with an additional weight of vengeance, as it well may. Now, is it not enough to make our very hearts bleed to think that immortal souls should die under the gospel; yea, die under aggravated guilt and ruin? So that, instead of being anything the better for this delightful message of peace and grace, they should be for ever the worse for it, and have reason to wish, through all eternity, that they had never seen the faces, or heard the voices, of those who brought it, but had been numbered

among the sinners of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah. Matt. x, 15 ; xi, 22. If we do not, on the express authority of our Lord, believe this to be the case with regard to impenitent sinners under the gospel, we are not Christians even of the lowest class. But if we do believe it, and are not affected with it, so far as to endeavor their recovery, I see not how any regard to our own temporal interest, or that of others, can entitle us to the character either of prudence or of humanity ; even though we had not been distinguished by a public office in the church, but had passed through life in the station of the obscurest among our hearers.”—*Doddridge*.

II. Christians invited to co-operate with their ministers in seeking the salvation of men.

“We shall esteem it, my friends, a very happy omen if your hearts be with ours on this occasion ; and if you help forward so good and necessary a design by your prayers to God for us. If you are sincere and affectionate in them, we may humbly hope that He, of whom we ask wisdom, will graciously impart it to us ; and may assure ourselves that you will not only bear with us in the plainest addresses to you which fidelity may oblige us to make, but will add all the weight of your countenance and interest to support us in our applications to others, whether public or private. And I have a cheerful confidence that all will not be in vain ; but that He who thus powerfully awakens our minds, will so succeed our labors, that many

whom we find under a sentence of condemnation, and ready to perish by it, will receive the forgiveness of their sins ; will be recovered to a new and divine life ; and, as the happy consequence of all, will at length be fixed with us, and with you, in the regions of everlasting security and glory. Amen."—*Doddridge*.

III. Christian usefulness resulting from Christian effort.

After stating that Harlan Page, a devoted private Christian, felt that his efficiency was all of God, and mingled with his exertions continual prayer for the gift of gifts, the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit, his biographer, summing up the results of those prayerful exertions, asks, "Is it wonderful that God should bless his efforts?—that in each church with which he stood connected, individuals, when relating their religious experience, should be heard referring to his faithful endeavors as the means of bringing them to Christ?—that a revenue of souls should have been gathered from the place of his nativity ; thirty-two be brought publicly to profess Christ from one of his sabbath schools, and nine of them have set their faces toward the ministry?—that thirty-four souls should have been hopefully gathered by him and his fellow-laborers from one ward of the city ; and fifty-eight in connection with his efforts, and those of a few endeared associates, have been brought to join themselves to the people of God, from the Tract and Bible houses?—that individuals should

come to his dying bed, and thank him, with tears, for his fidelity to their souls? Is it wonderful that, in speaking to her who is now his widow of his early departure, and looking back on his work on earth as ended, he should, with the solemnity of eternity on his countenance, say, 'I know it is all of God's grace, and nothing that I have done; but I think I have had evidence that MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED SOULS have been converted to God, through my own direct and personal instrumentality?'

"Look," adds the writer, "at the influence of such a Christian life on a large scale. Suppose every Christian labored, not to say with such talents, but with such a heart to the work. Suppose there were ten such Christians in every evangelical church throughout our land, and God should equally bless their labors. How would they rouse their fellow Christians to duty! How would they search the highways and hedges, and, by God's grace, compel the ungodly to come in! How would they instruct the rising age! How would they hold up the hands of faithful ministers! How would the Holy Spirit be shed down in answer to their prayers! How would their influence penetrate through every vein of this great community! And how soon would living piety here pour its influence on every benighted land! Such a light as would then shine could not be hid. It would illuminate the world, and Christ would come and possess the nations."—*Life of Harlan Page.*

IV. The usefulness of efforts by the distribution of religious tracts.

A lady, feeling a deep interest in seamen, put into the hands of the captain of a vessel, a few days before leaving port, a package of tracts and magazines for the crew. "I took them," said the captain, "and, according to her wish, distributed them among the hands, until the whole had gone the rounds among them. In a few days after leaving sight of the Highlands of Scotland for New-York, the second mate (a well-bred and intelligent young Scotchman) came to me, and said, 'Sir, I hardly know what's the matter with our men, but your tracts have produced a feeling among them that I have never seen before. If you have any doubt on the subject, just go, and look into the fore-castle, and see for yourself.' I stepped down, and, sure enough, every man was reading with an eagerness as though his very life depended on it.

"On returning to the cabin, the mate continued—'Sir, they wish the Bible read to them; and to-morrow (meaning the Lord's day) they wish to obtain your permission to hold a religious service among themselves in the fore-castle.' 'I can have no objection to that, I am sure,' said I; 'but who will lead them, mate, seeing none of us make any professions that way?' 'I shall make my best endeavors,' was the reply, 'and I suppose that others will do the same.' 'Very well,' said I, 'there is a prospect now of fine weather; make all snug; I will take the helm, and let every one that

wishes attend the service.' The arrangements were made, the sabbath came, and a meeting among themselves was held morning and afternoon. A privilege for a prayer meeting was again asked for the evening. I objected. 'But,' said the mate, 'you have had no objection all the day, why object now?' 'My wish is,' I replied, 'that you do not hold the meeting in the fore-castle, but in the cabin, where I may have a spice of the privilege myself, since I have accommodated you all day by standing at the helm.' Accordingly, in the evening, every man came into the cabin. I took the Bible, and read a chapter, and called upon the mate to pray. In a moment all were upon their knees. The mate proceeded a little way, but was soon choaked with tears, and could proceed no further. The cook then attempted to pray, but failed in the same manner. I then said to one of the apprentice boys, 'Billy, can you pray for us?' The little fellow began, and made an excellent, sweet little prayer, and seemed to get along the best of any of us. 'The fact is," continued the captain, "we were all overwhelmed with a sense of our sins; and, as there was not one of us that had made any profession of a religious experience, we made rather lame work of it at first; but I do hope that God in mercy has heard our poor petitions, AND CONVERTED EVERY MAN ON BOARD."—*From the Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society.*

V. The "weak things" of the world mighty through God.

A Christian lady writes: "You may remember at O——, a man named L——, an itinerant vender of caps, laces, etc., and on this account very commonly derided and nicknamed. His aged mother lived in Northamptonshire, and, for the sake of succoring her, he deemed it his duty to settle there as his head-quarters; still making his circuits as before. He was very active in Sunday schools, sick visiting, prayer meetings, etc.; and, while in O——, I had given him a few books to distribute. When his business brought him that way he always called, and on one occasion begged some books for his Sunday school, which he described as very low and destitute. Next time he brought a joyful report of its increase, and expressed very great gratitude for the gift of books, which was repeated. Again he called, and then begged that I would give him a few tracts—especially on the Sabbath, and on Public Worship—describing and deploring the general neglect in these particulars, and the sad desertion of the house of God.

"Next time he told me, with tears of joy, that there was quite a revival. He said that on receiving those tracts he determined to give two or three hours every Sunday morning to visiting families, and pressing their attention to divine things. Some of his interviews he related rather ludicrously; for instance:—He went into a house, and found a woman busy in making a pudding for dinner. He told her what time it was, and said that if she did not

make haste she would be too late for service. She said that she never thought of going to public worship; she was obliged to stay at home, and do for her family. He proposed the Sunday school, as she had children of an age for it, and none very young. She thought she would accept of this, but feared their dress would not do. This was obviated; and he pressed her to go to church. No, that was impossible. He then asked permission to read her a tract while she pursued her cookery. She consented, and he read one on the observance of the sabbath. She seemed much struck, and admitted its truth, and promised she would, next Sunday, get ready in time for public worship. 'But, my good woman, I can't bear to let it go till next Sunday; we know not what may happen between this and then. We have a quarter of an hour good now; so do go up stairs, and put on your things. I will make up your fire, and wipe down your table the while; and, depend upon it, when you come home you will find your pudding just as well boiled as if you had stayed to watch it; and, besides, you may get good to your soul, and that is more than the best dinner in the world. "I being in the way the Lord met with me;" but if we do not go in the way how can we expect him to meet with us?'

"He gained his point; and from that time the woman became a constant attendant at public worship, and her children at the Sunday school. In this way, he went from house to house; at some lending tracts, at others reading them;

and, in consequence, many who had altogether neglected the house of God were stirred up to a constant attendance. He subsequently told me that this resulted in several additions to the church ; and in the great encouragement of a minister who had been almost heart-broken at the low state of things." *X* *all*

Let every reader close this book with the inquiry, "WHAT CAN I DO FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, IN THE SALVATION OF MY FELLOW-CREATURES ?"

THE END.











